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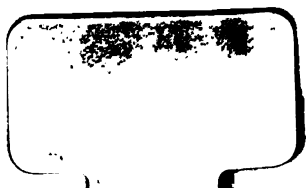








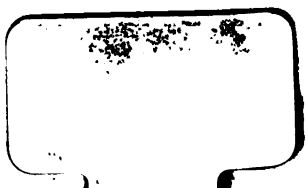
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THE  
PARSON AND THE POOR.

A TALE OF HAZELWOOD.

BY  
AUSTYN GRAHAM.

"The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of  
them all."—PROV. xxii. 2.

"He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he."—PROV. xiv. 24.

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## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

---

<b>CHAPTER I.</b>		<b>PAGE</b>
The Return	.. .. .	1
<b>CHAPTER II.</b>		
Hazelwood	.. .. .	13
<b>CHAPTER III.</b>		
The Rector	.. .. .	22
<b>CHAPTER IV.</b>		
The Village Church	.. .. .	30
<b>CHAPTER V.</b>		
The Herberts	.. .. .	43
<b>CHAPTER VI.</b>		
Beatrice	.. .. .	64
<b>CHAPTER VII.</b>		
The Cousins	.. .. .	75
<b>CHAPTER VIII.</b>		
Passion ..	.. .. .	95
<b>CHAPTER IX.</b>		
The Uninvited Guest	.. .. .	118



CHAPTER X.		PAGE
The Man of the World .. ..		139
CHAPTER XI.		
The Family Portraits .. ..		147
CHAPTER XII.		
An Impression .. ..		167
CHAPTER XIII.		
Stephen in Disgrace .. ..		176
CHAPTER XIV.		
Suspicious Characters .. ..		195
CHAPTER XV.		
Prompt Measures .. ..		216
CHAPTER XVI.		
Further Precautions. . . .		238
CHAPTER XVII.		
The Burglars .. ..		262
CHAPTER XVIII.		
The Old Parsonage. . . .		275
CHAPTER XIX.		
The Secret Discovered .. ..		285

# THE PARSON AND THE POOR.

## A TALE OF HAZELWOOD.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE RETURN.

“The house in troth is silent now,  
And hath a look of gloom ;  
I can remember dance and song,  
And lights in every room.”

MARY HOWITT.

It was the close of a sultry day in the month of June. The sun was slowly sinking behind the western hills that skirted the little village of Hazelwood, when a travelling carriage might be seen advancing along the main road in that

direction, — we say “might be seen,” for it was but a mere speck in the distance—unobserved by the band of rustics assembled at the toll-bar, whose eyes had been frequently strained towards that point, thus showing that they sought some object not yet visible to their anxious gaze. Latterly, wearied by suspense, they had fallen into groups, and in gossiping conversation the elders passed the time, while the younger members of the expectant party gambolled about on the turf at the road-side. At last, one urchin, after a most successful tumble, clambered breathless to the top bar of the gate, and in so doing descried the vehicle.

“It’s a coomin’, fe’ather!” shouted he, in the mixed northern dialect peculiar to that part of England.

All eyes were instantly turned to the road.

“Roon, Bill, roon, my lad, to t’ church,” said one of the men to an intelligent boy about thirteen years old. In a minute the lad was out of sight, and presently a triple peal of bells from

the church tower rang in the air, and announced some important arrival to the village.

A large travelling carriage swept by the group at the toll-bar, to whose hearty shouts of greeting and uncovered heads the occupant gave one cold, dignified bow. It was a lady—but whether young or old, dark or fair, a stranger could not tell—for a thick crape veil which she did not raise, concealed her features, as she replied by a distant, but not ungraceful inclination of her head, to her rough, but cordial welcomers.

A gentleman reached the gate at the moment the carriage whirled by—this compelled him to pause, and, as he did so, his eye fell on a very old man, whose dim, yet earnest gaze followed the now receding carriage. He stood with his hat still off his head, and his bent form supported by a stout stick, while the evening breeze softly stirred the thin locks of his white hair. Mr. Ravenshaw, the Rector of Hazelwood (for it was no less a personage), was

arrested by the touching expression of the veteran's countenance, and the tears which were gathering in his dim eyes.

"Why, Thomas," said he, "that is a sad face to greet your young lady with; yet have you not prayed that you might live to see her return? have you not spoken to me of the joy you would feel on this day?"

The old man turned round as the clergyman addressed him. "Ay, sir, it made my heart ache to see the old hall so desolate. I mind the time when it was a gay place enough. Old Sir Harley Vane, with his sons, Mr. Harley and Mr. Sydney, and a number of gentlemen, used to come down for the shootin' season, and there was grand doings when Mr. Harley brought his young bride to Hazelwood. We all liked Mr. Harley—he'd a cheery word for every one—the poorest and meanest among us; but the old *barrowknight* and his lady, and Mr. Sydney and Mr. John, as died in forrin' parts, and Miss Clare as wasted away when a lovely lass

of scarce sixteen — they was all mighty proud and high ; never a ‘good morning, Thomas,’ or ‘a fine day to you,’ but only a stiff bend of the head. You see, sir, it was in the fam’ly to have that lofty manner, and I don’t think they could help it, no more nor I can help my rough speech and ways. Mr. Harley and Miss Elizabeth, as is now married to a gentleman in Lon’on, the Hon’able Mr. Herbert, was the only two among ’em as was free spoken. I don’t know as Miss Elizabeth cared so much about us poor folks as Mr. Harley did ; but she was doting fond of him, and liked to do just as he did, and what pleased him—they was like as two peas, with the self-same blue eyes ; oh ! they was a fine handsome race as ever you see, sir—one couldn’t but admire them. Well, as I was a sayin’, Mr. Harley, he brought his bride down ’ere, and she was a sweet lady, for all her gravity, and pleasant spoken. Mr. Harley wooed and brought her from Lon’on ; she seldom smiled, and some peo-

ple did say—but I'm keeping you, sir, with my gossip, and may be you're throng—I'm an old man, and growing foolish."

"Finish your tale, Thomas," replied Mr. Ravenshaw, "I am going by your cottage to see Betty Lawrence, so our roads lie the same way."

The Rector always enjoyed a little talk with old Thomas Powley, who was the senior inhabitant of the place, and had many a strange story and touching incident to relate of events that had occurred during his long residence in Hazelwood; the spot where his eyes had first opened to the light, and where he would close them for ever in this world, without having once quitted his native place. Even in this age, when the march of intellect is making such rapid strides, and our lower orders receive an education which their great grandfathers would have trembled to anticipate, Thomas Powley may be cited as a model rustic—a good, pure, simple-minded old man, who, though he could neither read nor write, was, nevertheless,

“wise unto salvation.” The thread of the conversation having been broken, Mr. Ravenshaw found some difficulty in leading the old man back to the former subject of his discourse, (which had, almost insensibly to himself, much interested the Rector), for his mind had now wandered away to another topic, and thus he rambled on.

“Well, well, so old Betty’s going fast, sir; aye, but she was a bonny lass—I mind her and me a sittin’ on the same bench at the school, and——”

“But, Thomas, you have not finished your story. Why was her ladyship so sad, did people say?”

“Well, sir, some said as how my lady had broke a heart as loved her well, and was grieving, like; others, as she loved another better than the husband God had given her; but I be sure she was too good and pure a lamb for *that*, and I think none got rightly to that part of the tale; some said as how she lost her lover



beyond seas ; some, as she was to ha' married Mr. Sydney, Sir Harley's brother, him as went off his head, and died by his own hand, 'twas said—howsomdever, I know nought about it ; but that, from the time she come to Hazelwood a bride, to the day of her death a year after, she was never seen to smile. I used to do a bit of gardening at the Hall at that time, and I often see my lady a walkin' on the terrace with Sir Harley. He was a barrowknight then, you see, sir, for his father, poor gentleman, didn't live more nor two months after Mr. Harley's marriage. He was buried at Fair Oaks, their other place in W—shire, and so, I think, was Mr. Sydney and Miss Clare ; but there's monuments to 'em all in the church here as well—you've seen 'em, sir—but where was I?—oh, as I said, I used to see young Sir Harley a walkin' on the terrace with his lady—she so pale and grave-like, and he such a merry gentleman ; he'd look into my lady's face, with his laughing blue eyes, until I thought she couldn't but smile back again ;

but no, she was as still and tearful as ever—then he would fold her shawl so tenderly round her, as though, if he could prevent it, the winds of heaven should not blow on her too roughly, and he never seemed to see or feel her cold looks, but was never weary of watchin' and pettin' on her, and would stroke the hand that lay on his arm gently in his own, looking on her the while, oh, so proud and fondly, that I wondered how folks could suppose she did aught but love the noble gentleman. All thought as how when her babby was born, she would cheer up a bit—but nay, she dropt a few tears over its wee bit face, then gradually drooped from that day and died. Sir Harley could not bear the old place, and after my lady's funeral he went off abroad somewheres, I believe for many years, and then he went to live in Lon'on. Hows'ever he never come back here, and Hazelwood Hall has been without master or mistress until now."

"Then he took the child with him?" asked Mr. Ravenshaw.

“ Oh, aye, child and nurse both ”—here the old man paused, then added—“ mayhap, sir, you do not wonder now that these old eyes are dimmed ? they have seen sadness as well as gladness in Hazelwood, and when you spoke to me, sir, I was just a thinking of the day when I stood by that very gate, five-and-twenty years back, and saw Sir Harley’s carriage drive through it for the last time. Ah ! it was a sorrowful day for me and many more. I know’d as he’d never enter ’em again alive, and I little thought as the bit babby, layin’ in her nurse’s arms, would ever come back a fine-grown lady, to live among us.”

“ Sir Harley has died quite recently, I believe ? ” said the Rector.

“ Maybe nine months ago, sir ; they brought him down here to be buried in the vault along wi’ my lady. Mr. Herbert and his sons com’d down, and other gentlemen. There was six coaches, but I couldn’t bear to look at ’em. I know’d him so well, and I don’t like to think

on it—aye, well-a-day! Poor Mr. Harley! But here we are, sir, at my cottage, and there's my old woman a lookin' out for me. I'm coomin', Sally, I'm coomin', my lass!—won't you walk in, sir, and take a glass of our cowslip wine? Sally 'll be mighty proud if you'd taste it."

"Another day, Thomas, I thank you, for I must now be going on to poor Betty's—good afternoon to you;" and the Rector walked slowly away, musing, as he went, on the touching story that had been related to him: and in the following words we may attempt to embody his reflections.

"Now, if I had taken up a book comprehending so tragic a subject, I should, after a hasty glance, have thrown it down with the exclamation, 'Pshaw! morbid and romantic stuff!' Yet verily, if we look around us, and study the gravestones in the churchyard, we must confess that there is no tragedy so heart-rending—no romance so highly wrought, but

that it has its parallel in real life, where death and change are ever busy, and where the cry of the widow and the orphan ascends daily to their God."

## CHAPTER II.

## HAZELWOOD.

“Below me, there, is the village, and looks how quiet  
and small ;  
And yet bubbles o’er like a city, with gossip, scandal,  
and spite.”

TENNYSON.

HAZELWOOD is a small but very beautiful village in one of the northern counties of England. It is perfectly secluded, and, indeed, quite unknown to many residents in the same county, being situated ten miles from a town of any note, and prettily environed by hills and woods. Hazelwood lies in a valley, and is invisible to the eye until the traveller comes immediately upon it, when he finds himself an

object of no little curiosity to the small community whom he thus suddenly surprises. He is even a sight of terror to the little smock-frocked rustics, who, with hair bleached white in the sun, gambol round the cottage doors, believing in no higher enjoyment than manufacturing clay pies from the clean soil of Hazelwood; from which favourite and absorbing occupation they are disturbed by the approach of a stranger, a rare event, so rare as to send them all in yelling, "Eh, mammy, mammy, here's a strange man a coomin'!" This announcement will be followed by the mother's round figure and ruddy face at the cottage door, all her bairns clinging to her apron, and peeping fearfully from beneath it, while the good matron takes a bolder look at the somewhat abashed traveller—perhaps a solitary horseman, who wends his way through that obscure and remote village to a distant town.

A small spinney, composed of hazel and birch trees, not far from the main road, doubtless

gave the place its pretty and euphonious appellation. The population of Hazelwood did not exceed four hundred inhabitants. Their humble, white-washed dwellings surrounded the village green, and upon its well-worn turf stood a now rare, but respected relic of ancient days, the maypole, with a weathercock perched at the top. The largest of these tenements was the "Vane Arms," a whitewashed "public," with the heraldic bearings of that noble family executed in a vile daub upon the sign-board that swung outside. Some narrow back lanes, with a stagnant ditch running through them, boasted rows of cottages of rather more commodious and modern structure, which had evidently been run up hastily, to meet the increasing demands of the population.

Upon a piece of ground detached from the village, and on a more elevated site, stood the church, a small ivy-covered edifice, whose low grey tower and buttresses were just visible through the tall trees that begirt it, and that



spread their dark shady branches tenderly over the hallowed earth beneath, where in their last peaceful sleep had lain the tenants of Hazelwood for many generations.

A narrow green lane led up to the churchyard, at the end of which, and divided from the burial-ground by a low hedge of holly, stood the Rectory; an old, rambling building, that in its evident decay suggested the uncomfortable idea of rats and other noisome vermin; and yet there was the peculiar beauty of antiquity about it.

It was a large house, with three gables, built of red brick, subdued by age to a colour no longer offensive to the eyes. Mulioned windows, with diamond-shaped panes, were almost concealed by the rapidly-spreading ivy, and the tall, twisted chimneys afforded snug lodgings for a legion of swallows that had taken up their annual abode there from time immemorial.

The grass plat in front of the house was

unmown, and the gravel-path leading to the porch looked as though it had never known the pressure of a roller. The flower parterre at the side was overrun with weeds, and seemed utterly neglected; but the kitchen garden, situated at the back of the house, was in better order, and there an old man might often be seen in the morning, peeping into the cucumber and melon frames, or carrying along an apron-full of potatoes or other vegetables.

Such was Mr. Ravenshaw's residence; but as he had only succeeded to the living of Hazelwood within the last twelve months, its state of desolation could hardly be attributable to him. His predecessor was a widower, with no family; a man of singular and eccentric habits, who lived in the most parsimonious manner, simply discharging the official duties of his vocation, and no further interesting himself either in his parishioners, or, to judge from appearances, about his own house and garden. An apoplectic seizure had proved fatal

to Mr. Miller twelve months before the commencement of our story, and his successor found that the canker-worm of spiritual neglect had eaten deeply beneath the outward surface of guileless innocence and primitive simplicity in his small parish.

Mr. Ravenshaw had to contend with sullen pride, dread of interference, and absolute rudeness from the men; ignorance and self-sufficiency to combat with in the women, while the children were little better than wild, untaught animals. His first step was to build a square brick room, with a flat roof and one chimney, which was as much as his means would allow, for a school-house, and to entice the parents to send their children. He found little difficulty in obtaining this end; it was no small matter of thankfulness to the hard-working mothers to have some of their progeny taken off their hands during a great part of the day. And thus by degrees the good leaven began to work; a better spirit was infused into the village, the

church boasted a full congregation each Sunday, and before a year had elapsed the new Rector was universally respected and beloved.

Before closing this chapter, I must not omit a description of Hazelwood Hall, which had been the property of the Vanes for many generations, and for this purpose I must carry the reader a little out of the village to a noble mansion situated in its own grounds. The greystone walls and gothic architecture of the building gave rise to the surmise that it had been originally an abbey; but there was no foundation for this supposition, as Hazelwood Hall could not have dated more than two centuries from its erection. It was quite invisible from the high road, but accessible by the pretty iron gates at the lodge-keeper's residence. It was concealed from public view by the dense shrubbery that skirted either side of the broad carriage drive that led to the house, and by the high wooden palings that enclosed the park. Before the front windows of the Hall lay a

broad terrace-walk, below that a wide grassy slope, on which a herd of deer grazed peacefully. This undulation led down to the margin of a clear lake, upon which the delicate water-lily expanded its large leaves, in their season adorned by the snow-white and yellow flowers; an old long-disused boat lay at anchor beside the bulrushes at the water's side, among which two stately swans made their nightly roosting-place, and in the day-time sailed upon the limpid surface of the lake, which reflected back again to them their own proudly-arched necks and graceful beauty.

Hazelwood Hall had only been inhabited, since the sad event alluded to by old Thomas in the last chapter, by the housekeeper, Mrs. Gould, an elderly woman, and an ancient retainer of the family, who had taken up her abode in one of the lower rooms, and, with the assistance of a young girl from the village, kept the whole place carefully protected from dust and the inroads of damp or dry rot. A gar-

dener had also been employed about the premises, and on the couple at the lodge devolved, among other minor duties, the care of the two swans. Now, it was hoped and expected by the people of Hazelwood that the old Hall would throw open its doors again, as in the early days of Sir Harley Vane's wedded life, and the deserted grandeur of Hazelwood Hall be enlivened by fair faces, manly forms, and sounds of mirth and gladness. Much was expected from the daughter of the beloved baronet, by those who remembered her father's pleasant face and hearty manner. Whether she fulfils their expectations, will be proved in the sequel.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE RECTOR.

"Thou art no Sabbath drawler of old saws,  
Distill'd from some worm-canker'd homily;  
But spurred at heart with fieriest energy,  
To embattail and to wall about thy cause  
With iron-worded proof." \* \* \*

TENNYSON.

It is Saturday evening. The shutters are not yet closed at the old Parsonage, but the Rector has lit his lamp, and with his head bent over the pages of his sermon, he is carefully reviewing the subject that is to form his discourse on the following day. Wrong and robbery are words hitherto unknown in Hazelwood, and although access to his garden is easy, and his

figure quite discernible to any passer-by, Mr. Ravenshaw would no more dream of rising to close those shutters than he would of going to rest every night with a pair of loaded pistols under his pillow. The Rector was not only a brave but an unsuspicious man; he was stern and inflexible in his sense of right, but he was never known to make an enemy; his reproofs were given with firmness, but uttered with clemency, in a tone which irresistibly gained him respect and attention.

There are some men who convey in their whole appearance, voice, and manner, an idea of power, and exercise a peculiar charm, yet at the same time an absolute authority over all those who come in contact with them. Such an one was Mr. Ravenshaw. This singular property will be found, upon observation, attributable to those who, sensible of strong passions in themselves, have striven hard, and again and again battled against the inward warfare, until, the antagonist conquered, and his attacks



having become fewer and fainter, their spiritual nature has risen triumphant, and they have gained that greatest of all victories—a victory over their own passions, their “flesh being subdued to the spirit,” and their whole soul strong in its sense of might and right. This strange influence over others may be marked in some women, also the same in cause and effect, but may be noticed more frequently among men.

Every line, every feature of Mr. Ravenshaw's face spoke of power; the massive brow and black hair becoming rapidly interspersed with grey, although he was not yet forty years of age, commanded for him outward respect and deference; his dark brows were slightly arched, and clearly defined; his nose rather large and aquiline; the mouth by no means small, but not the least attractive part of the Rector's countenance, from the manly determination it evinced when in repose—a determination almost amounting to severity, yet which totally disappeared when his lips were parted

with a smile, softening and lighting up his whole face with an expression almost feminine in its sweetness. There was a look of sadness in his dark, hazel eyes, as though some early grief had cast a permanent shadow over his heart ; that this was actually the case did not appear improbable, as Mr. Ravenshaw, a man so constituted by nature to love and be beloved, had never taken unto himself a wife.

He had not long returned from fulfilling the perilous and arduous duties of a missionary in Africa ; nor would he have ceased from the prosecution of his zealous work, had he not been attacked by a severe tropical fever, from the effects of which he could not hope to rally, but by a return to his native country. Here, after assurances from several of the most eminent London physicians that he could not survive a return to the former scene of his labours, he had consented to remain, much to the satisfaction of his only surviving relatives, a married sister and her husband.

The connexions of his brother-in-law, Colonel Berkeley, were rich and powerful, and through their interest he had obtained the little living of Hazelwood, an incumbency in the gift of the Chancellor. Mr. Ravenshaw could not be said to be a *rich* man, with an income of barely five hundred a-year ; but notwithstanding his limited means, he must have contrived to set aside no small portion for works of charity, for he was never known to refuse his support to a case of merit and necessity. And it was only when these occasions presented themselves that the Rector regretted fortune had not blessed him more largely. A selfish thought or feeling never entered his heart ; money had no value to him but as the means of enabling him to benefit others ; and assuredly no man was better calculated to spend a princely fortune judiciously and profitably than Mr. Ravenshaw.

Now, perhaps the reader is saying, "why, this man must, indeed, be perfection, a hero worthy of a romance, a creature of the author's

imagination." No such thing, my severe critic; there are thousands of such men now living, we are thankful to say, or what would become of our poor brethren, many of whom, by the strenuous exertions of such, are placed in comparative ease, both temporal and spiritual? Go forth upon the face of the earth and seek them out, if ye have not yet found them. "Their good works shall go before them." You may meet with them in the crowded cities, by the bed-side of the dying sinner, or even in the haunts of misery and vice, and you may trace their presence in many a small village, where, under a faithful pastor's eye and hand, the little flock moves slowly on to seek its rest in safe pastures, even among the chosen ones in God's own kingdom.

Mr. Ravenshaw was one of those stern, conscientious men who do much good in their generation, but we have no intention of representing him as a divinity to be worshipped. He was a man of strong passions, which,

though they may be held in subjection, can never be wholly extinguished within those in whom they are inherent.

As a young man, previously to his ordination, he had for a brief period yielded to the temptation afforded to dissipation during a college career; but good influence had reclaimed him from the error of his ways, had suddenly changed the current of his life, and after the lapse of a few years he had taken Holy Orders.

While we have been making this dissertation upon the Rector and his antecedents, he has been disturbed by the entrance of his only female domestic, a middle-aged handmaiden discreetly selected by his sister, either on account of the absence of all seductive charms in her, or for steady integrity and intrinsic worth, to superintend the household arrangements of her bachelor brother.

Mary's object in thus intruding, was to close the shutters of that very window through which we have been giving the reader a glance at the

Rector ; and since darkness has enveloped the Parsonage, our eyes must carry their scrutiny elsewhere, or adopt the still better plan of resting with the people of Hazelwood through the night, and awaking with them on the morrow.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE VILLAGE CHURCH.

“ She came to the village church,  
And sat by a pillar alone ;  
An angel watching an urn,  
Wept over her, carved in stone.”

TENNYSON.

“ Like softened airs that blowing steal,  
When meres begin to uncongeal,  
The sweet church bells began to peal.  
On to God's house the people prest :  
Passing the place where each must rest,  
Each entered like a welcome guest.”

TENNYSON.

A PECULIAR calm and tranquillity reigns throughout a country village on the Sabbath morning. It is not the mere cessation from weekly toil and

labour ; for that is observable, thank God, in every spot—be it city, town, or village, throughout our blessed England. The difference is this :—

In cities and towns, where there are a vast number of inhabitants, a vast number of temptations and allurements, there must be sights and sounds to offend the eye and ear—the rattling of noisy vehicles and the brawling of the drunkard will mingle their unhallowed strife with the measured tones of the bells that are inviting men to the house of God—that solemn invitation to which many are utterly deaf or indifferent, as they go flaunting by to make holiday, or join some party of idle pleasure-seekers. Now, in a village, it is the perfect consistency that creates the charm—the entire harmony of soul with body, the complete unison of outward nature with the inward workings of the spirit—the total abandonment of every secular toil or amusement—and the prompt obedience paid to the little tinkling bell that summons all those who hear it to kneel and worship in the presence of their Maker.



We awake at Hazelwood on the Sunday morning. The single bell is waxing fainter and slower, and a few stragglers are loitering outside the church porch, to catch the first glimpse of the Rector as he shall emerge from his garden-gate, and advance towards the church.

Among these expectants is old Peter Newton, a little, withered man, who fills the double functions of clerk and cobbler in the village; Jerry Dawson, the burly landlord of the Vane Arms, and John Brooks, the tailor and vender of miscellaneous articles to the good people of Hazelwood; a dapper little man, rather of the Napoleon character in both face and figure; and remarkable for a peculiar one-sided cock of the hat, that gives him a jaunty, devil-me-care kind of air.

"Well, Master Newton," said the latter gentleman, addressing the worthy clerk, who was busily polishing his spectacles previously to their morning's work, "I suppose we shall have a

sight of our fine lady to-day, but she's kept pretty close at home as yet. I don't know a soul as has clapped eyes on her."

"Aye, she's not set foot outside the park gates since she come," replied old Peter. "But her father was a reg'lar church-goer—it was afore I was clerk here, which is twenty year come next Michaelmas; but I was allus at church o' Sundays, and I never mind Sir Harley bein' away from sarvice when he was down at Hazelwood, and she's a chip o' the old block, Mr. Brooks, so look to see her here this day, sir."

"That grand gentleman, all powder and shoulder-knots, as my lady brought down wi' her from Town, looked into my place last night," said the burly publican, "and was mighty pleasant. We had a glass or two together; and, at last, I made bold to ask him of his lady. Well, he twisted his face queer-like; so I says, 'Ain't she so free-hearted and likeable as her father the Baronet, as the old folk here think so much of?'

‘She ain’t no more like him than you’re like me!’—now he’s a slim young chap—and then he shuts up; but I’d not a mind to let him go till I’d heard summat more, so I asks him to take another glass. ‘Thank you, Mr. Dawson, I don’t mind if I do,’ says he. So I mixes him another. While he drinks it, I has at him again—but I promise you he was a tough subject—at last, he gets up, and, tossing off his last drop, makes to go—but, first of all, he looks at me with a cunning look like, and takes me by the button. ‘Now, Jerry Dawson,’ says he, ‘I likes you, and I likes your liquors, and I dare say as you’ve been thinking me a bit close and uncivil; but you know it doesn’t do for us poor fellows as earns our own bread to blab about or say a word agin the hand as gives it us for our sarvices. Sarvants must have eyes and ears, hut no tongue, mind you—however, as we’re by ourselves, I’ll just tell you this’—and here he whispers in my ear—‘my mistress is as proud as Lucifer, and that’s all I or any one

about her knows, and as much as any of you'll know of her, I'll be bound !' When he'd said this, the feller turned on his heel and was gone. Well, you *are* a rum chap, thinks I, and—look-out, Peter, here's the Rector."

In an instant, the old clerk was fumbling over the pages of the big, time-worn liturgy in his desk, and presently Mr. Ravenshaw entered. The rays of the sun shone on his pale, high brow as he ascended the reading-desk, and, in conjunction with the whiteness of his priestly robes, increased the air of spirituality that at all times pervaded his countenance.

In a short time the village church was filled with its usual congregation—not ever a very large one at morning service—and the Rector was about to rise and commence with the solemn texts appointed by our rubric, when he was arrested by a significant gesture from old Peter, and, anticipating the announcement of some christening or churching, he bent forward to learn the cause of the worthy clerk's anxiety,

who was now raising his spectacles and peering up to him.

“Ax yer pardon, sir,” he whispered; “but Miss Vane’s not here—won’t you wait for her?”

Mr. Ravenshaw glanced at the clock. It was past the canonical hour.

“Certainly not,” he replied, gravely; and he began the service in the deep, sonorous, yet sweet tones, peculiar to him.

The interior of Hazelwood Church was by no means remarkable, being low, whitewashed, and void of beauty. At one side of the pulpit stood an empty pew, whose cushionless seats and worm-eaten floors denoted it as having been long unoccupied: this was appropriated to the Rectory. Nearly opposite was one of those huge boxes with high sides, often to be found in village churches; and, upon enquiry, announced as “the squire’s pew.” This compartment had evidently undergone complete renovation; for a handsome piece of carpet covered the floor; luxurious hassocks and soft cushions invited

*repose* rather than suggested *prayer*; and from a brass rail that surrounded it hung a curtain of rich purple damask.

Presently, the sound of carriage-wheels was distinctly audible on the gravel outside; and, after a few moments' delay, the lady of Hazelwood, robed in deep mourning, walked up the church. The sight of a dignified figure, clad in a richly-flowing dress, was all that rewarded the gaze of the many eyes that followed their stately lady (for her face was still concealed by the thick crape veil) before the pew-door—(opened wide by the obsequious lacquey who had followed with his mistress's richly-bound prayer-book)—had shut her from their view.

Several domestics then entered the church.

A pretty lady's maid, as fashionably dressed as her mourning garb would admit of, now absorbed their attention. She was accompanied by an ancient butler, and they, with Stephen, the footman that followed his mistress, and none other than the one alluded to by Jerry Dawson,

took their places in the seat next to the large pew.

Such an important event as the arrival of so many strangers in a village church so small and obscure as Hazelwood, might well account for a few more wandering thoughts and glances than usual among that little devout congregation. But the distraction did not extend itself to their clergyman. His eyes were never lifted from the page before him, although, from his raised position, he alone could command an insight into the squire's pew. The prayers ended, the Rector ascended the pulpit, and was giving out the text of his discourse to his listeners, when he suffered his gaze, almost involuntarily, to rest for an instant on the face of the lady who confronted him.

Mr. Ravenshaw was a man of very quick perceptions ; and, probably, observed more in that momentary glance than others would have read in a prolonged gaze. He carried home with him that day the remembrance of a very lovely

face, with the patent of nobility stamped on every lineament, although white as the marble tablets of her family that hung above her head. He saw the proud curl of the rose-bud lip, and the scornful dilating of the nostrils; but he passed over these traits to dwell admiringly on the passionate and concentrated depth of expression he had encountered in the dark, hazel eyes of the lady of Hazelwood. He did not trust himself to look again in that direction; but he felt conscious that he had, at least, *one* attentive and earnest listener.

At the conclusion of the service, Miss Vane left the church with a step as proud as she had entered it, ascended her carriage, and was whirled away in the direction of Hazelwood Hall.

A heavy shower fell in the afternoon about the time of re-assembling beneath the sacred roof; notwithstanding which, there was a very large congregation; most of whom, it is to be feared, went away a little disappointed—and, con-



sequently, not so benefited by their devotions as they should have been—at the non-appearance of the lady of Hazelwood.

“I was surprised to see you at church this afternoon,” said Miss Tomkins, an ancient spinster and the village post-mistress, to Mrs. Brooks, wife of the afore-mentioned John Brooks, a small delicate-looking woman, with a consumptive cough, whose accustomed prudence had been overcome by her curiosity to behold Miss Vane.

“And pray why should you be surprised, Miss Tomkins?” retorted Mrs. Brooks, with some asperity.

“Oh, I thought,—your cough, a-hem—and the rain—that you would, that is”—here Miss Tomkins gulped away her confusion and incoherence, adding judiciously—“but indeed you’re looking a sight better, Mrs. Brooks, and I’m right glad to see you venture out again.”

“Thank you, Miss Tomkins, kindly, I’m sure,” replied her companion, quite appeased

—"my good man said as he'd stay at home, and mind the children, if I liked to go out for a bit; for our Betsy always goes to church, you know, in the afternoon; it was but a light shower—so I thought I'd come and hear the Rector—God bless his kind voice and noble face, say I!"

"Amen!" responded Miss Tomkins, with solemnity; "he is a right good gentleman: but have you seen Miss Vane yet, Mrs. Brooks?"

"Pray, how should I, Miss Tomkins?" quickly replied the lady addressed, with a return of tartness; "and, for my part, if she's as proud as people say she looks, I don't care to see her; let her keep to her grand hall, and not meddle with poor folk as are as good as she is, every bit, if they've honest hearts, and get their living by their labour, tho' they don't live on the fat of the land like rich folk!"—here Mrs. Brooks reached her own door, where she was met by her husband with one child in his arms, and another, a chubby boy, that left his father's

side, and toddled towards his mammy, with extended arms : this turned Mrs. Brooks's thoughts into a more amiable channel, and with a very different frame of mind she caught the little one to her bosom, and covered him with truly maternal caresses and kisses.

Miss Tomkins pursued her homeward way rapidly, for rain was again falling, and she thought of her best bonnet. Twilight soon closed in, and to the grey damp of evening succeeded a night of steady and refreshing rain, eagerly sucked up by the thirsty soil of Hazelwood.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE HERBERTS.

" I never was a favourite,  
My mother never smiled  
On me with half the tenderness  
That blessed her fairer child.

" The very morning of my life  
Was dimmed and stained by tears,  
My pale cheek never had the rose  
That youthful beauty wears."

THE breakfast cloth was laid in the spacious dining-room of a fashionable house in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square—the town residence of the Honourable Charles Herbert, M.P. The little French ormolu clock on the mantel-piece pointed at the hour of eight, but as yet the

room was tenantless: unless the reader's imagination can endow with a bodily presence the full-length portraits that adorned the walls, and made them, as they were so frequently called, "speaking likenesses."

The room was furnished handsomely and with good taste. On one side of the white carved marble fire-place stood a rosewood grand piano, and upon the other a luxurious sofa. Over the piano hung a full-length portrait in oils, evidently fresh from the brush of an eminent Royal Academician. It represented a lady, about forty years of age, in whose comely cheeks the ruddy tints of youth yet lingered, while the warm feelings of girlhood might still be traced in the bright blue sparkling eye. The brow was smooth and unwrinkled, although the golden hair was slightly streaked with grey, and the full dignity of the matron's figure had long superseded the slight form of the girl. Such was Mrs. Herbert.

A portrait over the sofa, upon a similar scale,

represented Mr. Herbert: it was almost as recent as that of his wife. His figure was tall and commanding—the head massive, the eyes keen, and the brow intellectual. Years of deep thought had turned Mr. Herbert's hair grey; but his brows were left as dark as in the days of his youth. There was an expression that would have displeased a physiognomist about the thin, compressed lips, as seeming to betoken a certain hardness of judgment and closeness of calculation, possibly not innate, but acquired by too clear a knowledge of the world and its workings, through the medium of his fellow-men. We will pass from the pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert to that of a group of children, occupying a large gilded frame on one side of the room opposite the window. This was not such a recent production as the two that we have been describing; and it was neither so well executed, nor of so high a school of art. The subject consisted of three boys. The eldest, apparently about fourteen, was seated upon a low chair in the fore-

ground, with a book on his knees, from which his shrewd grey eyes were just raised : this was John Herbert, the eldest son, and his father's handsome features had been transmitted to him very truthfully, but there was a colder and more peevish expression about the mouth, and though the face was not deficient in intelligence, there was not the same indication of talent that was observable in Mr. Herbert's keen dark eye.

The other two boys stood rather more in the background ; the elder, a fair and effeminate youth, dressed in a check tunic, was in the act of fastening a pair of mock reins, composed of gay red braid, round his little brother's chubby, bare arms. These two younger children both had their mother's fair skin and blue eyes, yet they could scarcely be said to resemble each other ; for there was a listless affectation about the elder, with his straight, golden hair, regular features, and slightly-parted lips, that formed a striking contrast to his younger brother's round honest face, with its ruddy cheek, bold blue eye,

little snub-nose, and curly hair. Other pictures surrounded the room, but they were standard engravings, with one exception; a sketch in crayon of a young officer: whom we have little difficulty in recognizing, after a lapse of some twelve years, as the second son of Mr. Herbert; for, although he has laid aside the dress and toys of his childhood for manhood's garb, he hardly looks less boy-like than in the large painting; the arm that rests on his sword's hilt being little more formidable than when, in former years, it brandished the plaything whip over his younger brother.

But now the door opens to admit a woman, staid and middle-aged, with a careworn and not altogether pleasing face. She carries in her arms a little boy, but of what age it is almost impossible to tell, for his small, thin face is so drawn and contracted by suffering, that there is no look of careless childhood about it; he is evidently not one of the healthy, happy children depicted in the large painting on the wall. Oh,



how pale and wan look the high brow and sunken cheeks as the nurse lays him on the sofa, and the golden sun shines in through the window upon him ! His dull, brown hair falls on the green sofa-cushion in soft masses, and his eyes are bright, dark, and sensible ; but the mouth has contracted a peevish curl of the lips, and it would require a very loving eye to detect 'beauty in those irregular features. Yet there was one who did so : there was one to whom that little sufferer knew himself to be most dear and attractive ; but she was far away, and at that moment his loving young heart was bursting with a new sense of loneliness.

The nurse folds a shawl carefully, but not tenderly, over the small shrunken limbs, and turns to leave the room, with a slight curtsy, as Mrs. Herbert enters, dressed in a very becoming morning robe.

“ Good morning, Nurse ! What ? no one yet down stairs, except Master Charlie, and nearly nine o'clock ! For shame, lazy boys ! I'm not

surprised at Sydney; but Vane is not often so idle. Have you heard anything of either of them, Nurse?"

"Mr. Sydney had not taken in his can of hot water when I passed his door just now; but Master Vane has been out this hour, Ma'am, goodness knows where!" added the privileged old servant, almost inaudibly, as she quitted the room.

Mrs. Herbert laid her hand on the bell-rope; then, as if suddenly remembering a duty unperformed, stooped over her little son's reclining figure, and putting back the soft hair, left the impress of a gentle kiss on his brow—but it was a kiss without warmth or fervour—and then she issued the delayed summons, which was speedily responded to by a footman bearing the coffee urn, and proceeding to spread on the white cloth all the luxuries of a rich man's table.

Mrs. Herbert had seated herself, and was engaged in rinsing putting the proper proportion of sugar in each cup, when the door burst open,

and this time it was not to admit the stiff, pompous butler, who trod in the presence of his mistress as though he was shod with velvet, but a tall, handsome youth, evidently in the full enjoyment of robust animal health and spirits. He was now hot and flushed, and as he threw his arms around his mother's neck, he exclaimed :

“ Oh, ma, good morning ! Do you know, I've had such a lark ! there are such a lot of rats in the stables, and Bill's got such a jolly little rough terrier, and he only wants twelve bob for it, and I wish, ma, you'd ask pa to let me buy it.”

“ Now, my dear Vane,” replied his mother, in a tone of distress, “ I wish you would not make such requests of me—you know I cannot bear to refuse you anything ; but indeed I do not see how I can do this. You know your father would not allow Charlie to have the little spaniel your cousin Beatrice was so kind as to wish to give him, and if——”

“ Well, but, ma, that was in the house, and

pa hates dogs in doors; but I should keep Pop in the stables, and he's such a jolly——"

"Well, well, we'll see about it; but what was its name—did you say, Pop? how very ugly! I'm sure it's not a fit dog for a young gentleman."

"Oh, ma, you should just see it! it's the jolliest little——"

"That will do, Vane: don't tease any more about it now, there's a love; and I wish you'd leave off saying that horrid word 'jolly;' you know your father can't bear to hear you make use of slang expressions."

Here her hopeful son burst into a loud laugh. "Why, ma, 'jolly' isn't a slang word—I'll fetch the dictionary and show you—it means——"

"I wish you'd fetch your papa to his breakfast, that would be more to the purpose, my dear, for here's poor Charlie almost starving."

With a hasty nod to his brother, which was not met by any sign of recognition from the

young cripple, the rough schoolboy left the room to fulfil his mother's behest. In a few minutes he returned from the library, rather more quietly, followed by his father, who, after bestowing a hasty, but kind greeting upon his little boy on the sofa, sat down at the breakfast-table with his wife and son. The wan face that had relaxed a little from its apathetic, almost sullen, expression at his father's approach, now resumed its accustomed indifference, and he took no part in the conversation.

"Sydney is becoming worse and worse—he is quite incorrigible—a little military discipline will do him good," said Mr. Herbert, in the grave, almost austere tones habitual to him.

"He was very late at the opera last night," said Mrs. Herbert, with motherly solicitude. "I dare say he's sadly tired, poor fellow; I quite tremble to think how he'll bear his new career and the heat of India, for I'm sure he's far from strong."

"Pooh!" replied Mr. Herbert, impatiently; "the young puppy has no complaint but idleness, and ails nothing but what a necessity for active exertion will cure; he'd turn night into day soon, if he stayed hanging about town much longer. Does he know what o'clock it is?" and the justly-displeased paterfamilias held up his watch.

"Run to your brother's room, Vane, dear," said Mrs. Herbert, aside, "and mind you wake him gently, if he's asleep, and beg him to get up, love."

"Won't I give him a jolly 'cold pig,'" muttered the boy, as he left the room.

"A pretty soldier he'll make," pursued his father, still wrathful, "lying in bed till this time of day. If it had been Vane, now, who had got his commission, I should have some hopes of him, he's made of the right sort of stuff, and what muscles and sinews the lad has, to be sure! By Jove! if Sir Harry were to see him, I think he'd wish fate had made him Vane's Godfather

instead of Syd's. He always had a strong fancy for that boy, and he's grown a fine fellow since he was here two years ago."

Mr. Herbert's eye had followed his manly son with paternal pride. The mother's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Charles, surely you don't mean—please, dear, don't put it into Vane's head to be a soldier. Don't ask Sir Harry Stanhope to procure him a commission also. I could not bear to lose both my boys," and her voice failed her. She remembered not the one who then lay listening in pain to his mother's words. He knew she was not proud of him—how could she be? and he, sickly, deformed, ugly, and a cripple. But oh! it was hard to think she did not love him. The words, "both my boys," rang in his little ears—had she then but two sons? Charlie now felt for the first time that his mother would never feel *his* loss as she would either of theirs; but he struggled with and conquered the rising weakness—he forced back his tears and swal-

lowed his coffee with difficulty and an aching heart.

Presently the door opened, and his brothers entered. The elder, fair, slender, and as effeminate in point of beauty as in the days of his youthful portraiture, but very tall, and dressed with the fashionable propriety of a young Guardsman *in esse* ; the younger we have already described ; and they were faithful in appearance to the promise of their childhood.

Languidly did the elder son go through the matutinal salutations, and with little appetite he tasted of the delicacies on the table. Mr. Herbert, though unsparing in his censures upon them to their mother in their absence, did not, unless absolutely necessary, enforce commands upon his sons, or annoy them with reproofs, now that they were arriving at an age to resent or feel irked by too strict a surveillance and authority, so the delinquent's laziness was passed over with a slight sally, and the conversation turned upon indifferent subjects — the last



night's debate, the impending war, and various other topics of the day.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of George the footman, bearing a silver waiter, on which were laid several letters. He went at once to his master, who distributed them as they were addressed. Mr. Herbert claimed several uninteresting, business-like documents. Mrs. Herbert opened hers with a smile of pleasure, and Sydney, with a look of some discomfiture, quickly conveyed to his pocket an ominously neat envelope, with a flourishing address, apparently undesirous to acquaint himself, or already too well acquainted, with its contents. After a nervous glance at his father and mother, which satisfied him that they were engrossed with their own communications, Sydney recovered his composure, and quietly applied himself to buttering a piece of toast, totally ignoring his brother Vane's pantomimic endeavours to attract his attention, and the palpable formation of the letter "B" between his lips.

It appeared to Mrs. Herbert, after she had finished the perusal of her own letter, as if her husband would never have done reading his ; she had evidently something she wished to communicate, and directly he laid them aside, she began.

“ Here is a letter from Beatrice, Charles ; she is now quite settled at Hazelwood, but she finds it dull there, all by herself, poor girl, I dare say, and she wants us to go and stay with her for a few weeks—do you think we could manage it, dear ?”

“ Not at present,” replied Mr. Herbert, “ it wants more than a month to the recess. Of what is Beatrice thinking ? she surely does not mean directly ?”

“ Beatrice has not forgotten that it is out of the question for you, Charles ; but—here, read her letter—Vane, give it to your father.”

“ Ah, I see,” said Mr. Herbert, reading, and remarking as he proceeded. “ Well, yes, if you don’t mind leaving London just in the season,

you might run down for a week or so with nurse and Charlie, as she says, and I could come perhaps from the Saturday to Monday, and bring you back to town again when you're tired of it."

"Ah, that is a delightful arrangement!" said Mrs. Herbert, her blue eyes sparkling at her husband's suavity, "we may consider it quite settled, dear; I will pack up and set off with Charlie and Nurse one day this week, and you will come down and fetch us in a fortnight. I'm sure I shall have had enough of it by that time; it needed all poor dear Harley's merry ways to make it a cheerful place in days of yore, and I fear it must be a dreary old house enough now."

"I wonder you're so anxious to go there," said her husband, dryly.

"My dear Charles, you know I love Beatrice as my own child, and would willingly sacrifice my own feelings to gratify her; besides, I think the change will do Charlie good." Mrs. Herbert then rose and whispered in her hus-

band's ear ; " Nurse says he's so peevish, there's no doing anything to please him, and she fancies he is fretting after his cousin."

Mr. Herbert sighed, but he only said, " Poor child !" and rose to leave the table, adding aloud, " then, now the point is determined, the sooner you're off the better, Lizzie; but I think you should pack Master Vane off to school again first; I will not undertake to keep him out of mischief in town."

Vane's countenance fell. Mrs. Herbert had been re-perusing the letter, and now exclaimed, " Dear me, Charles, we overlooked the post-script;" and she put it into her husband's hands, looking anxiously in his face as he read it. He returned the letter to her without a remark.

" Have you any objection?" she asked.

" None at all," was his answer. " I think, as regards Vane, it is the best plan," and he left the room.

" What's all this about, mother?" asked Syd-

ney, suddenly arousing himself ; “ are you going to Hazelwood ? ”

“ Yes, dear ; and your cousin says in her postscript, she shall be glad to see you and Vane too, if you do not mind leaving London for a country village—you may do as you like, Sydney, but Vane, my love, I should like *you* to go with me.”

Sydney whistled, and seemed undecided. Vane, a true lover of country sports and liberty, expressed by most vociferous shouts his acquiescence in the proposed scheme.

At this moment suppressed sobs were heard from the sofa. Mrs. Herbert went there immediately. She knelt down and raised her child's pale face from the pillow, but he struggled from her arms and buried it again in the cushions. Vane ceased his loud merriment.

“ What is the matter, Charlie ? ” asked his mother. “ Don't cry—have we said anything to hurt you ? Hush ! hush ! dear boy ; are you not glad you're going to see your cousin Beatrice

and Hazelwood Hall, and the beautiful country that you are so fond of? Oh fie, Charlie, to cry like a baby, we must ring for nurse; I'm glad papa was gone out of the room—what, must not mamma kiss him? Oh, naughty Charlie!"

"Never mind, mother," said Sydney, nervously; "come away, you are only teasing him, and you know very well he doesn't mind you at all—don't you see you make him worse now, fussing over him?"

"Well, I can't have him fretting away down here then," said Mrs. Herbert, pettishly; "pushing his own mother from him; he's a most unnatural child—here, Vane, carry him to the nursery, he'll perhaps be happier there; and he may have the Book of Beauty out of the drawing-room—the one with the face like Beatrice in it, that he's so fond of looking at, to carry up with him. There, take him away—he's a very naughty child, and nobody will love him soon."

As gently as he was capable of doing anything, Vane raised his little brother in his arms, and bore him from the room. None knew it was excess of emotion, not childish temper, that caused that sudden flow of tears—emotion too powerful for the little weakly frame to contend against—a sudden rush of overpowering happiness that he was so soon to meet again the only one who had ever comprehended or sincerely loved him. None of those about him observed how gradually sorrow and suffering were weakening that shattered frame, and rendering it less fit to endure any violent excitement, whether of pleasure or grief. His sobs became fewer, but more convulsed, as his brother bore him up the stairs, trying, by rough, boyish words of kindness, to still his throbbing agony. His mother had asked him, “if he was not glad to go and see his cousin Beatrice?” She had opened the flood-gates yet wider, and unpent the channel of his tears. Was he glad? Every fibre of his little sensitive frame shook with excess of

feeling—trembled with a joy, deep, unutterable, and wild, arising from the love, little short of idolatry, which he cherished for his cousin Beatrice.



## CHAPTER VI.

## BEATRICE.

“ \* \* \* Such eyes were in her head,  
And so much grace and power breathing down  
From over her arch'd brows, with every turn  
Lived through her to the tips of her long hands,  
And to her feet. She rose her height, and said :  
' We give you welcome.' ” \* \* \*

TENNYSON.

THE sun was sending his most burning rays into the drawing-room at Hazelwood Hall, fading the handsome Brussels carpet in the most cruel manner, and making the mahogany chairs blister and crack with heat. The very pictures appeared simmering in their frames, when the lady of Hazelwood entered and averted the work

of destruction, by stepping outside and letting down the green Venetian blinds which cast a shade over the apartment.

We shall become tedious if at the heading of each chapter we minutely describe the furniture and adornments of the room in which we place the characters that are to figure in our tale. We can easily leave to the reader's imagination a handsomely-furnished drawing-room, with pictures, and large mirrors adorning the walls. Near one of the windows stood a small round table, of mediæval workmanship, and upon it a richly inlaid desk of Indian manufacture, wrought in sandal wood and ivory.

Miss Vane seated herself on a luxurious sofa, and drawing the little stand towards her, opened the desk. There was in Miss Vane's whole appearance that peculiar kind of elegance which so unmistakeably marks the English gentlewoman. All her movements were perfectly un-studied, yet every attitude was graceful, every gesture striking and effective. The folds of her

loose morning-dress draped themselves with classic precision around her tall statuesque form. Her face was a perfect oval ; and the dark hair was so banded off it as to warrant the supposition that its owner was well aware of the beauty of its outline. The eyes were large and almond-shaped, the lashes that fringed them long and dark, the features delicate and regular ; but as there are specks in the sun, or we could not bear to look upon its brightness—as there is no beautiful, no sunny thing of earth but has its shady side, so there was that in Miss Vane's face which marred its loveliness, and left its possessor many degrees removed from angelic perfection. When in repose, a proud coldness and hauteur were its characteristics ; but sudden kindlings and flashings in the eyes, a quick heaving of the breast, or a close pressure of the delicate taper fingers, would occasionally betray passionate workings of the heart, with difficulty curbed, and hidden beneath that calm, haughty exterior. Few had seen these indications : Miss

Vane was pronounced "a handsome woman, but very apathetic and heartless, and dreadfully proud," and from the world she desired no better judgment, for while she mixed in it, she despised it.

She had been everything to her father ; and had repaid his devotion with her whole heart, resolutely repelling those butterfly admirers, in the gay fashionable society among which she moved, who had hovered around her. Since the loss of her only remaining parent, ten months before the commencement of my tale, she had lived with her aunt, Mrs. Herbert, (Sir Harley having appointed Mr. Herbert guardian to his orphan daughter during her minority), until she had formed the sudden determination, from what appeared to them some unaccountable caprice, that she would take up her residence at Hazelwood.

But to return to our heroine in the drawing-room. Miss Vane's pen flew nimbly over the paper between her delicate white fingers, upon one of which glittered a neatly-wrought ring of her father's hair, set in chased gold. She ceased

her busy task for a moment, as the rather unusual sound of a ring at the door bell met her ear, and echoed loudly through the lofty hall. Miss Vane's self-possession was not in the least disturbed, although the rapid approach of footsteps heralded the rare event of a visitor. Presently Stephen threw open the door, and announced Mr. Ravenshaw.

The clergyman entered with a grave dignity and self-possession which must have effectually disarmed any attempt at patronage from the high-born dame. That there was no warmth in Miss Vane's reception of her guest, was rather the fault of her manner than of her heart. She did not extend her hand to him, but merely bowed her head, and with a graceful, though somewhat chilling courtesy, requested the Rector to be seated.

"I am sorry, Miss Vane, to have been thus tardy in bidding you welcome at Hazelwood," said the Rector, "but my parish duties have lately been very engrossing. I hope you will

like our little quiet village sufficiently to take up your permanent residence amongst us. There is much that a lady might do here in visiting among the poor, and ministering to their wants."

"It is quite my intention to make Hazelwood Hall my home," replied Miss Vane, stiffly. "I am very fond of a country life."

Mr. Ravenshaw was not the man to be daunted by a woman, so, though he detected the determinate reserve and resolute antagonism against any approach at intimacy on his part, he as determinately and resolutely met and combated the terse replies he received, until the barrier began to give way and the conversation to assume a less restrained and more friendly tone.

After some desultory talk, the Rector again expressed his hope to Miss Vane that he might claim her kindly interest for one or two poor families in the parish, and offered himself to accompany her in her first visit to their dwellings.

She drew herself up haughtily, and the man-

The colour rose and fell on Beatrice Vane's pale brow and cheeks during this speech. She had never been talked to thus, and her pride, rather than her heart, was touched. She remained silent, her taper fingers nervously playing with the folds of her dress. Mr. Ravenshaw's eyes were bent on her with an earnest, yet not quite approving gaze. Presently, she looked up with a kindling eye, that fell instantly before his, and continued :—

“All you have said is, doubtless, very just and very true, Mr. Ravenshaw. But you must allow me still to maintain my resolution. I am willing to do good in my own way ; but I do not intend to intrude myself into the cottages of the poor people. You, as a clergyman, must visit them in their dwellings ; and, whenever you will honour me by a call, and inform me of any necessity I can relieve, I shall be very happy to do so ; I trust you will never find me backward in fulfilling that part of my duty—the only part I recognise. Now, let us change the

subject. Have you seen what a pretty view there is over the park from these windows?"

And, with a strange nervousness, a tremor she had never before felt, she hastily rose to escape from the earnest, searching eyes that were still reading her face; and, lifting the sash, she endeavoured to raise the green blind; but it required a stronger pull than those delicate arms and hands could give. Mr. Ravenshaw hastened to her assistance, and then they stepped out on to the terrace walk. As they pleasantly and easily conversed together, their past difference appeared to be forgotten. When the clergyman took leave of his fair parishioner, she said:—

"Mr. Ravenshaw, will you give me the pleasure of your company at dinner next Thursday? I am expecting my aunt, Mrs. Herbert, and her sons to stay with me, and shall be very happy to introduce them to you. My aunt has been accustomed to late hours—I hope seven o'clock will not be inconvenient to you, or interfere with your parochial duties?"



There was a lady-like consideration in the wording of this invitation that much pleased Mr. Ravenshaw, and it was immediately accepted. Though he warmly took Miss Vane's proffered hand at parting, and would fain have held it longer in his own, yet, had he been compelled, after their interview, to analyse his sentiments towards that lady, he would have found it difficult to do so. He unhesitatingly *admired*, but was not equally certain that he *liked* her.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE COUSINS.

"Hark ! 'tis the bell that tolls for the dead,  
Some one has passed from his sorrow."

OXFORD HERALD.

"HOLLOA ! what's that?" exclaimed young Vane Herbert to his cousin Beatrice one afternoon, as she stood at the open window of the dining-room, talking to him, while, with true school-boy appetite, he was partaking of that usually slender repast between breakfast and dinner called luncheon. "Holloa ! what's that?" and he laid down the knife and fork with which he had been threatening a second attack on the pigeon pie. His remark had reference to a mournful, measured sound

that fell upon the ear of both, as it was wafted through the summer air.

"It must be the passing bell," replied his cousin; "it is so slow and muffled in its tone."

Vane joined her at the window.

"Did you know any one was ill, Trissy?" he asked.

"No, I did not," she replied, and a faint glow was perceptible on her pale cheek.

"I say, you don't half do your duty, Beatrice," continued the boy. "I fancied you sailing about in your grand way, first to this cottage, then to that, and the poor people coming to the door, and making those funny little *bobs* like that old woman we met yesterday evening, and saying 'God bless you, my lady,' and 'thank you for all you've done;' and that I should have to go with you to carry your little basket of good things for the sick creatures; in fact, like a regular 'lady-bountiful.' But, instead of all this, I'll bet my new fishing-rod to your gold

chatelaine that you don't know one of their blessed names."

Miss Vane only smiled at her young cousin's speech ; but the colour yet lingered in her cheek as she turned towards him, and said :—

"Finish your luncheon ; Wakelyn and Stephen will be coming to prepare the table for dinner. It is nearly three o'clock ; and you must try, my dear boy, to come in more punctually to meals !"

"I've done !" replied he, springing after her—  
"I did mean to have had some more of that famous pie, but I'm dashed if I can be left here alone with that wretched bell tolling in my ears—it's quite taken away my appetite."

Beatrice laughed.

"I think you have had quite sufficient, Vane, if you mean to eat any dinner at seven o'clock : I shall not offer to remain with you, to induce you to partake of more."

So saying, Miss Vane passed into the spacious hall, and her boy-cousin seized a straw hat from

one of the chairs, and, shouldering his fishing rod, proceeded to the lake, there to resume his favourite sport of hooking and mangling, without the slightest remorse, worms and fish.

In the drawing-room Miss Vane found her aunt seated at her work—if the easy pastime of braiding a pair of slippers can be dignified by a term that indicates a certain amount of labour. Her cousin Sydney, deep in a novel, stretched his weary length on three chairs before the window; and on the sofa, his eyes closed in the sweet slumber of childhood, and seemingly free from pain, lay the young cripple.

“I am so glad you have come, Beatrice; why did you not leave that tiresome boy to have his luncheon by himself? What is that bell tolling for? I can’t bear the sound—I hope it will soon leave off—who do you think is dead, my dear?” asked Mrs. Herbert, in a breath.

“I do not know, aunt,” replied her niece, quietly; “how very handsome those slippers will look when you have finished them.”

"I'm glad you like them, my dear; they're for Sydney when he goes to India; he was half inclined for a chocolate ground and dark-blue braid, but I persuaded him green and gold would look much richer—don't you think so, Beatrice?"

"Decidedly handsomer," replied her niece, adding, "aunt, if that bell annoys you, shall we have a drive? I will order the carriage directly; there is a very fine old tree, about five miles off, that was struck by lightning a few years ago, and we should just have time to go and see it this afternoon before dinner."

"It would be very pleasant, my dear, and I will be ready in a few minutes;" and carefully laying the elegant slippers in her work-basket, Mrs. Herbert covered it with an embroidered handkerchief, and tripped out of the room, while Miss Vane rang the bell, and issued a command to Stephen that the carriage might be brought round without delay.

"Do you go, Sydney?" she asked.

"I think not," he answered, scarcely raising his eyes from his book. "It's very hot, isn't it?"

"Not quite so warm as you will find it in India," replied his cousin, with a shade of sarcasm. Sydney opened his large blue eyes and closed his book.

"Do you want me to go, Trissy?" he said quickly.

"Not at all," she answered, dryly; "I'm afraid you would not enliven our drive much by your conversation."

"Well, then, I shall stay at home," replied he, gradually allowing his superabundant length of leg to touch the ground, and with a mighty effort becoming perpendicular. "I get so cramped sitting in a carriage for an hour or two, besides taking up so much room. What is Charlie awake?" he asked, seeing his cousin was not attending to him, but bending over the little sleeper.

"What is it, Charles? are you in pain?"

she whispered. A cold perspiration had broken out on the child's brow, and he awoke with a start, looking wildly around him; his eye fell on his cousin kneeling beside him; he threw his arms round her neck.

"No, no, it was only a dream," he cried; "but I thought you'd gone away from me again—oh, don't leave me, darling." Beatrice quietly unclasped the little closely-locked hands from her neck, soothing him gently as she did so, and allowing him to retain her hand between his.

"I must leave you presently, dear boy, for I am going for a drive with mamma."

The child set up a wild scream, and clung again to his cousin this time so wildly and convulsively, that she could not free herself; and there was yet strength enough left in those small, attenuated fingers to inflict a severe pressure. Miss Vane uttered a cry of pain; Sydney sprang forward, and roughly seized his



brother's arms, thus compelling him to release his hold of his cousin.

"You little tiger!" he cried fiercely, "is that the way you show your affection? Leave go this instant! Has he hurt you, Beatrice?"

"Not much," she answered, but her looks belied her words. At this critical juncture Mrs. Herbert entered in haste attired in her bonnet and shawl.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed; "surely that cry came from Beatrice!" In a few indignant words Sydney recounted his little brother's delinquency. "Oh, you naughty Charlie," said his mother, gravely shaking her head; "what I shall do with you I don't know! Give your cousin a kiss, and beg her pardon directly, or I'll send you home to-morrow." The child looked the very picture of sulkiness and obstinacy; his lower lip pouted, and his face appeared almost deformed in its ugliness.

"Will you be so kind, my dear aunt, as to

leave me alone with Charles for a few minutes ? I will not detain you longer," said Miss Vane, quietly. With a glance of admiration and approval at her niece, Mrs. Herbert beckoned to Sydney, and they left the room together. When the door had closed upon them, Miss Vane drew a chair up to her young cousin's side and sat down by him for a moment. She spoke not, but looked with a penetrating, sorrowful gaze at the boy's still sullen countenance; she then drew up her sleeve and showed the white skin already discoloured from his severe gripe.

"Charlie, do you see this?" she said, sadly. "You have hurt me; I am surprised that one who knows so well what suffering is, can bear to inflict it upon another; above all, upon one who loves you as I do." The boy's features worked convulsively—his cousin proceeded,—  
"But it is not the pain you have made me endure that now grieves me; it is to see how completely you allow your passions to govern

you ; how you set your little stubborn will in opposition to your mother's, and how you repel every affection but mine, until you will alienate even your own flesh and blood from you. Now do not sob ; I ask you earnestly, as I have always striven to please you, dear Charlie, and to lighten my little cousin's weary existence—try to be a good boy, if not for your own sake, for mine.” Here she softly kissed his brow, now no longer heavy and lowering.

Oh, Beatrice, all you said might be very wise, very good, but the fundamental principle was wrong. What ! not one word of religious warning to that little headstrong boy ? Was he to do right not for his soul's sake, but your's ?

“ Dear, dear Beatrice, I am so sorry I hurt you—I will never, never be such a bad boy again ; I will mind what mamma says. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! you will never love me any more ! ” and the little head rolled about in an agony of remorse. But the child soon became

composed under his cousin's skilful management, and then Stephen was summoned to carry him upstairs to nurse, from whose hands he re-appeared equipped for a drive with his mamma and cousin, the evident traces of his penitence having easily obtained this favour for him from the ever-indulgent mother.

\* \* \* \*

That evening Mr. Ravenshaw dined at the Hall. As may be imagined, the gentlemen did not sit long over their wine after the ladies had retired from the table. Sydney and Vane had both been rather *glum* all the afternoon at the responsibility of entertaining "a parson;" but when the elder youth chose to exert himself, he could talk sensibly and agreeably; and on the present occasion it pleased him to do so, and Vane was at all times sociable and familiar with every one; however, it was not to be expected that a grave clergyman and two racketty boys

could have many topics in common ; therefore when, about half an hour after they had been left to themselves, the conversation flagged, Mr. Ravenshaw proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room. There lay the little invalid boy on the sofa, and at his side sat Miss Vane. She was reading aloud, the child's eyes earnestly bent on her face, with an absorbed, excited expression in them, which changed to one of sullen annoyance at the interruption, for the reader laid down her book as the gentlemen entered.

"Where's my mother?" asked Sydney.

"She has gone for a walk in the grounds—she found it so warm indoors," replied his cousin.

Vane threw his arm over his brother's shoulder and led him to the open window, whispering as he did so. Sydney gave a hesitating glance at Mr. Ravenshaw, and seeing he had seated himself by Miss Vane's side and entered into conversation with her, yielded to

his brother's solicitation, and stepping from the window, they strolled in search of their mother.

"Who is this little boy?" asked Mr. Ravenshaw, and he took the small, wasted hand kindly between his own. "Is this another cousin, Miss Vane?"

Charlie had not made his appearance before dinner. Beatrice replied in the affirmative, and then the Rector bestowed some notice upon the poor boy, but without eliciting much response, whether from sulkiness or shyness it was impossible to detect. At length Mr. Ravenshaw asked what book they had been perusing, and Beatrice put it into his hand. It was quite a new work that she had got from London expressly for her young cousin, entitled, "Scenes and Characters; or, Eighteen Months at Beechcroft," by one of the prettiest writers of the day. Mr. Ravenshaw had not read it, but turning rather suddenly to Charlie, he asked him for the loan of it when his cousin had finished

reading it to him. The right chord had been struck ; the boy suddenly brightened up.

“ Oh, yes,” he replied, his eyes quite sparkling with enthusiasm ; “ it is such a pretty story, sir ; I like that part about poor Phillis and the gunpowder so much—we’ve just read as far as that ; and Maurice is such an odd boy—and oh, do read it—I’m sure you’ll like it.”

The Rector possessed great tact ; he soon found out his young companion’s bent was literature, of a simple and childlike kind, it is true, but still his mind was evidently of an intellectual order ; he led him to speak on those books that had interested him, until you would hardly have recognised that eager, animated young face as the same that usually looked so sullen and gloomy. . But this brightness was not to last, for early hours were deemed advisable for the delicate child, and at the usual time nurse appeared to carry her young charge to bed. This was the signal for as violent a rebellion on the part of the young gentleman as his little impo-

tent frame could sustain. Beatrice stood passively by; in this instance she did not interfere, for she knew that his mother was very particular that the doctor's injunctions should be carried out, and she was not unaccustomed to the scene; but there was something revolting to Mr. Ravenshaw in thus treating a boy of a reasonable age; for although bodily infirmity might render him a child in helplessness, yet it was evident, from his conversational powers, that his mind was rapidly forming itself; and that *now* was the time it would receive the stamp for good or evil.

"How old is he?" inquired the Rector of Miss Vane, aside, while the skirmish between the boy and his attendant continued.

"Just thirteen," was the reply.

Mr. Ravenshaw raised his brows with a look of surprise.

"Charles," he said in an audible voice,—the uproar ceased. "Charles, will you come down to the Rectory to-morrow morning, and I will



show you my library ; there are many works that would interest you in it ; but you must be with me by nine, as I have some business soon after twelve, and I will send my old gardener down with a Bath chair we have on the premises for you, therefore you had better go to bed now, that you may be able to get up early and have your breakfast in time."

The effect of this speech was instantaneous ; the boy readily accepted the friendly invitation, and allowed nurse to carry him off without a murmur. Mr. Ravenshaw closed the door after them with a sigh.

"How very small he is," said the clergyman. "Pray how did he become so afflicted?"

"A succession of convulsion fits when quite an infant paralysed his lower limbs," replied Miss Vane. "He has been a great sufferer, and, from the want of proper exercise, his health, of course, fails sadly."

"Ah, then, it is incurable, I fear," replied the Rector. "Until I heard the cause, I entertained

a hope his infirmity was temporary, or, at least, not beyond the possibility of relief."

Miss Vane shook her head mournfully; and Mr. Ravenshaw did not like her the less that he noted the large tears gathering in her soft, dark eyes. He had not given her credit before for much depth of feeling; and he changed the subject.

"I have had a loss among my parishioners to-day—she was an old person; and as good a woman as ever breathed—so honest and simple-minded. Hers was a painless deathbed."

And the Rector leant his head musingly on his hand. His thoughts were with the dead, not the living; and he started when Miss Vane addressed him.

"I heard the passing bell this morning—for whom was it, did you say?"

"Old Mrs. Laurence. Her husband was your father's bailiff; but he died many years ago; and, after his death, her sons took to poaching, and other lawless ways. The end of

it was, they drained their mother's little savings; and then one of them was transported for life, being implicated in some burglary and murder—not here, but somewhere quite up in the north, where they had gone, ostensibly to seek employment. The other son came home to die, repentant, I hope and believe. Poor Mrs. Laurence's latter days have been, I should fear, but sad and lonely—childless, and with only sufficient means to afford her the necessaries of life. Were it not for the kindness of the neighbours around her, and the warm regard and sympathy of all who knew her, I doubt her heart would have broken long ago beneath her trials.”

“Oh, Mr. Ravenshaw, why did you not tell me before of this? I might have rendered her some aid or attention during her last illness,” exclaimed Miss Vane, reproachfully.

“She was beyond the reach of medicine or human skill when you came to Hazelwood; and the only comfort you might have rendered

her, in the shape of a visit from the child of her beloved master, as she called your father, was one you gave me to understand the poor must never seek from you. But, believe me, Miss Vane, until you go among your people, study their characters, and observe personally what their necessities may be, you must not expect yourself or your generosity to be properly appreciated by them."

At this juncture their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Herbert and her sons. Vane was exceedingly vehement about a willow wren's nest he had found in a low bush at the lake's side, and which he was somewhat elated at having had the forbearance to leave unmolested; though it appeared his mother's persuasions and his brother's threats had been necessary to the exercise of this little act of self-denial on the part of the school-boy.

After coffee had been served round, Mrs. Herbert asked Beatrice to sing; but Mr. Ravenshaw, pleading a meeting with his church-

wardens, as to the pending question of daily services in the church, took his departure soon after nine o'clock. Had he had a previous opportunity of hearing the low, sweet tones of Beatrice Vane's melodious voice raised in song, it might have been deemed the discreet bachelor-clergyman was "fleeing from temptation"—but no such thing. In "contemplation fancy free," as far as the lady of Hazelwood was concerned, did the Rector pursue his homeward way; his bosom calm and passionless as the countless stars that looked down upon him with their bright, twinkling eyes from the pure heaven above. His thoughts were wholly absorbed on the point he was about to discuss; the arguments he must use to defeat the obstinate reasoning of the stubborn adherents to ancient abuses—his whole mind given to the one reflection, that if he were to do his Master's work, it must yet be without "offending one of these little ones."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## PASSION.

"The usher took six hasty strides,  
As smit with sudden pain—  
And down he sat beside the lad,  
And talked to him of Cain."

Hood.

CHARLES HERBERT was quite ready, and all impatience for his visit to the parsonage, when the old man made his appearance before the hall door the following morning, with the conveyance Mr. Ravenshaw had promised to send. And not only that day, but nearly every other morning, found the boy comfortably established in the Rector's study, so surrounded with volumes of all sorts and sizes, that, but for the lit-

the pale face peeping out from among them, you might have supposed the couch a mere repository of dusty old books; for the young student had suddenly changed his childish taste, now opportunity was afforded him to do so, and was eagerly perusing ponderous works on antiquities and histories of the middle ages. Mr. Ravenshaw had taken a great liking to the boy; he saw in him evidences of strong intellect and deep powers of thought. He also detected the warm, impulsive nature so cruelly repressed and misunderstood by those around him, running to evil for lack of proper vent—and a strong mind, capable of grasping much, utterly neglected and uncultivated. Because they saw no change in the slender, child-like form, they forgot that the mind far outstrips the body; and, indeed, is often precociously developed in those whom nature has stunted and deformed in their outward growth.

But Charles Herbert, from being treated like an infant, had lacked the energy to assert him-

self with manly dignity, merely showing his resentment by evil tempers, which, while regarded by those about him as outbursts of childish rage, were in reality the ripening passions of manhood, holding riot in his breast—being fostered there—and gradually destroying the soul within.

We have said before that Mr. Ravenshaw was an acute observer : he noted all this during the first evening he spent at the Hall, and saw at once that a different mode of treatment must be used with the boy. Ever bent on good works, he determined, during Charles Herbert's visit to Hazelwood, to take him seriously in hand, and endeavour in some measure, by kind and judicious management, to eradicate the effects of the false system hitherto pursued with him ; and before the boy left, to speak to Mrs. Herbert seriously, (as he considered his position and office warranted his doing), on the subject of her younger son's education, which had been sadly neglected.



Charles little knew what was passing in the Rector's mind, as he lay coiled up, "as happy as a king"—(an unfounded and inappropriate simile, but warranted by custom)—upon the old rickety sofa in the library at Hazelwood Parsonage, or perhaps he might have withstood any plan of compulsory learning, and mistrusted his wise new friend, who, as matters now stood, threatened to rival his cousin Beatrice in his affection. But no, not so, there was room in that poor little crushed heart for both, and Charlie's greatest happiness on his return from these visits, was to throw his arms around his favourite cousin's neck, and, drawing her head down on the sofa beside him, when they were alone—as they often managed to be—to tell her of what he had read ; all Mr. Ravenshaw had said to him during the day ; and how he admired and revered him. And where was Miss Vane's pride then ? not a trace of it in her lovely face, only the rare sweet smile and melting eyes reigned in beauty there ; where was her pride in those moments ?

all centred in that dear boy who was prattling so cleverly, while his tiny fingers wound themselves into the loosened tresses of her dark hair, and pulled it down in heavy, waving masses over her shoulders.

Yet Charlie's amendment was by no means instantaneous. Nurse and he still met in single combat; but their onslaughts were comparatively few. Master Charles began to disdain his antagonist, and from very contempt ceased to resist her authority; besides, a new kind of shame had awoke in him. It degraded him in his own eyes, and he shrunk from meeting the Rector afterwards. The days passed uneventfully but pleasantly by, and Mrs. Herbert's visit of a fortnight at Hazelwood, extended itself into a month.

When Sydney found it was his mother's intention to prolong her stay in the country, he either feigned to receive, or, we do not wish to be hard upon the newly-made Ensign, actually *did* receive a pressing invitation from some

friends in the gay metropolis to a large fête ; to which, with a courteous farewell to his cousin, he departed.

After a long succession of fine days, a severe thunder-storm appeared to change the state of the atmosphere ; it became suddenly cooler, but the wind settling itself due west, the inmates of Hazelwood Hall awoke one morning to a cloudy sky and a steady fall of rain, which showed little prospect of abatement during that day, at least. And, unfortunately, the unfavourable state of things was not confined to simple atmospheric discomfort ; it was far from being "all serene," as Vane expressed it, within the Hall. Master Charlie was in one of his most wilful and unmanageable moods ; his mother's influence, never very potent, was this morning utterly inefficacious to soothe or intimidate the fretful child ; and even his cousin stood aloof from him in haughty displeasure at the indifference with which her rarely-bestowed caresses and gentle admonitions had been received.

Nurse shook her head, and expressed a grave conviction that "Master Charles had got out the wrong side of his bed," which was hardly possible, as the poor little fellow was quite incapable of such physical and voluntary exertion, and therefore had there been such an error, she was responsible for it. The truth was, Charles was deeply interested in "Grose's Antiquities," which ponderous work he made his study at the Parsonage. This morning he had promised himself a few delightful hours in Mr. Ravenshaw's library; the old man was to fetch him as usual at ten, and he almost hoped, that notwithstanding the rain, the chair might be sent to convey him thither; he was the more anxious for this treat, as for the last few days the Rector had been unable to receive his little guest. On Friday, Mr. Ravenshaw had ridden over to N——, the nearest town; this had necessarily detained him from home the greater part of that day; on Saturday, he never invited him, neither did he visit the Hall on that day,

which was devoted exclusively to meditation and preparation for the next day's duties.

Now, on Monday, Charles had looked forward to resuming his interrupted reading, and very unlike a hero he bore the disappointment. When eleven o'clock, and no old "Bogey," as Vane had nick-named the ancient gardener, from his cognomen of "Bogue," made his appearance, the dissatisfied boy really became, as his mother so frequently called him, "quite unbearable." At length, matters came to a crisis ; Vane good-naturedly sat down to play a game at chess with Charles, of which the young student was far more fond than his volatile but obliging brother, but it requires a calm mind and cool head to play that scientific game successfully. Charles had neither—that morning he was conquered.

Mrs. Herbert and Miss Vane were seated with their work at the other end of the room, rejoicing in the temporary serenity, when a loud crash announced Charles's defeat, and the down-

fall of the pretty Elizabethan stand on which the chess-board had been placed. The ladies started up—that it was no accidental blow, or kick, that had laid the small table low, was evident to them from the strong passion that worked in every feature of Charles's pale countenance, and the small hands that had dealt the sudden and destructive stroke were clenched in all the agony of suppressed rage.

Young and puny as he was, it required a person of strong nerve to approach him at that moment; but when he allowed words both loud and abusive to escape his lips in conjunction with his brother's name, Beatrice Vane walked with quiet dignity towards the sofa, and by an effort of strength which courage and determination alone could have given her, raised the angry boy in her arms, and bore him towards the door.

“Oh, Beatrice,” exclaimed her aunt, “you cannot carry him, love, ring for Stephen: Vane, help your cousin;” but her voice was drowned by Charles's shrieks.

"No," replied Miss Vane, while her eyes glittered, "if Charles chooses thus to disgrace himself before us, I will carry him to his room myself. I shall not allow him so to expose himself before my servants."

The boy clung round her neck, not lovingly as he so frequently did, and then with a savage clutch seized her glossy hair. They had just reached the door, when it opened from the outside, and admitted Mr. Ravenshaw: the passionate screams had reached his ears, and he entered in time to relieve Miss Vane of the burden she had rather rashly imposed upon herself, for her strength had begun to flag beneath the child's frantic resistance. In a few minutes, quiet was restored. Charles lay pale and trembling from his recent excitement, on the sofa. Miss Vane had resumed her seat at no great distance, her eyes were cast down, and her cheek very white. Vane was intent on repairing the damaged table; and Mrs. Herbert, shocked and alarmed at the recent scene, had left the room.

The Rector was bending over Charles's couch; his words were evidently intended for the boy's ear alone; but Beatrice caught a sentence now and then. She heard him remind the child how, from yielding to headstrong temper, murder was often committed; and he recalled to his memory how Cain, in a fit of passion, slew his brother.

"You were, this morning, in the sight of God, Charles, a murderer," said Mr. Ravenshaw; "you had the will, and only lacked the power, to kill. At the moment I entered, had you been able, you would have wrought any harm to your cousin."

Here the Rector's voice sank to a whisper, but she soon after heard him tell the boy how passion was the crime least extenuated in scripture: for did not Cain, although we are told he repented him of the fatal blow that deprived his brother of life, bear upon him for ever the mark of the accursed one? "that wicked one who slew his brother." Our Saviour, "when he was re-



viled, reviled not again ;' and who among us is called upon to endure what he did ?"

For a long time did Mr. Ravenshaw talk thus to the now truly penitent boy ; and, finally, carried him away with him to the Parsonage—not to reward him for his misconduct—but to encourage the workings of repentance he perceived in his altered countenance, and to teach him how to strengthen himself against future attacks from his greatest enemy—a passionate temper. But Charlie would not leave the Hall until, with tears in his eyes, he had begged his cousin's forgiveness for his misbehaviour, and received from her lips the pardon always too readily granted ; and, alas ! too easily forgotten by the suppliant.

But we must now retrace our steps, and state how it was that Mr. Ravenshaw arrived thus opportunely at the Hall. About twelve o'clock the rain abated, and Mr. Ravenshaw, fearing that Charles might have been disappointed when the chair did not come for him as usual, summoned

the old man, and himself accompanied him to fetch his little friend. We have seen under what circumstances the Rector found him, and the good effect produced by his well-timed entrance. The boy's shame at having been surprised in the contemptible situation of being carried out of the room, struggling like a baby, by one whose good opinion he had already learnt to value, did not appear as though it would pass off during that day's visit to the Parsonage, for his cheek burned whenever he encountered the Rector's eye. For the first hour of his visit, Charles occupied himself with "The Antiquities;" but he could not concentrate his thoughts so entirely upon the subject as usual, for he was still filled with grief and humiliation at the remembrance of his recent exhibition of temper.

The Rector did not embarrass his little friend by any further allusions to his misconduct. He was apparently very much occupied in selecting suitable works from his own library, and setting them aside in a separate shelf for the perusal of

the villagers, but he was presently surprised by Charles's asking abruptly—

“Mr. Ravenshaw, were you ever in a passion?”

A change passed over the Rector's countenance, as he replied—

“Yes, my boy; and I would save you, if possible, from the guilt into which an ungovernable temper nearly plunged me. It was quite my intention, Charles, when I brought you home with me to-day, to tell you before you left of an incident in my life, which, were it not that it may be a warning to you, I would rather keep silence upon, as it is a painful theme; but you must promise me not to lose sight of the moral through your interest in the tale,” for Charles's eyes were already opening wide with expectation.

“No, no, I will not, indeed; but oh, sir, you cannot think how I wish to grow better.”

“You must bear with fortitude the lot God has assigned you, my dear boy.”

"You mistake me, sir; I mean that I do *so* wish to do what is right, and not to get into passions, especially with Beatrice, who loves me so. You cannot think, sir, how good she is to me."

"But you must not say, 'especially with Beatrice;' for, Charles, whether your evil temper is exercised towards your cousin or towards one to whom you are indifferent, believe me, my dear little boy, it is equally criminal."

Charles looked very thoughtful for a moment, then with sudden recollection exclaimed—

"But your story, Mr. Ravenshaw, if you please."

The Rector arranged the cushions with feminine gentleness beneath the boy's head, and seating himself at his side, at once commenced the narrative.

"What I have to say, Charles, will be related in few words. When about a year older than you, I was sent with a brother, two years my senior, to a private tutor's in Hampshire, where

there were six other pupils besides ourselves. Wednesday and Saturday being half holidays, were usually passed by us in summer-time at cricket in a large meadow at the back of the house. The incident I am about to relate happened on one of those fine sunny afternoons. We had carried on the game with great spirit for some time, when a knotty point arose that created a dispute between us. A youth named Rawlings was batsman, I was bowler, my brother George umpire. Now, after I had pitched the ball, as I thought, in a most scientific manner, and so skilfully as to knock the bail some yards off the stumps, I was surprised by the general cry of 'no ball! no hit!' Indignantly I asked the meaning of these words, and was told that my foot was within the bowling crease, and consequently my successful ball disallowed. My brother alone was silent; eagerly I turned to him to defend my cause, and all demanded his decision, as the elected umpire. 'You are wrong, Ernest,' said he; 'your foot was this side the

bowling-crease, but you sent the ball too swiftly for me to stop your hand.' I was in a passion; it was our last innings, and on my expert bowling depended our victory or defeat. The ball was thrown back to me; but vowing I had not transgressed the rules of the game, I refused to play any more. 'Nonsense, Ernest, don't lose your temper,' said my brother, 'and our game into the bargain.' 'Go on, Ravenshaw!' shouted one of my schoolfellows, 'you're a capital bowler, and he'll be out next time, I'll bet a guinea.' 'Try again, man,' cried all. 'Just look sharp after him, then,' sneered Rawlings, 'or I'll answer for it he'll cheat.' 'Give him a back-hander, old fellow,' whispered one of our side. My whole frame trembled with rage. Rawlings and I had never cordially liked each other; at that moment I felt that I hated him. 'Look out Rawlings,' shouted I, 'and if this is a true ball, you'll never call me cheat and coward again.' With a steadiness of hand almost miraculous in my state of rage and excitement,

I flung the ball—it whizzed through the air, and struck Rawlings on the temple—he fell to the earth. For a moment my feelings much resembled those of David when triumphantly he saw the Giant of Gath laid prostrate by the small stone slung by his feeble hand ; but when with a cry of horror my companions clustered round the recumbent boy, and raised his apparently lifeless form from the ground, a cold shudder crept over me, and I already felt myself branded for ever as ‘a murderer.’ What was said I know not. I scarcely think any one looked at or thought of *me* ; and in a dreamy stupor, with a sensation as though all the blood were frozen in my veins, I saw three of my companions raise Rawlings’ body in their arms and bear it towards the house. I did not follow them, but a terror of the consequences of my deed crept over me. I turned and ran rapidly from the spot. For more than a mile I fled over fields and meadows, until, in utter exhaustion, I fell upon my face on the grass, and

tried to close my eyes to the deadly pallor of that countenance, which seemed to be still close at my side, accusing me of murder. Presently my whole body burned as though scorched by fire; and then I thought I felt something cold and slimy crawling among my hair. I started up, and saw, as I thought, Rawlings at my side grinning with a face too ghastly for earth, and stretching out his long white finger to touch me as I shrunk away, while the blood trickled from a wound in his temple. Suddenly his form changed into my young sister's sweet face, who smilingly told me I was dreaming, and laid her cold hand on my burning head. I awoke from this delirium of brain fever to find myself in my little bed at school, while my mother was bending gently over me and applying ice to my throbbing brow. 'Oh, mother! mother! don't look at me!' was all I could whisper, and I tried to hide my guilty face from her pure eyes. How could I bear to hear her say she knew her son was 'a murderer?' and had I been suffered



to recover but to bring public disgrace upon my family? The horror of that time I shall never forget. Believe me, my dear Charles, the agony I endured from the commission of that awful and impulsive act until the blessed moment when my mother told me that Rawlings lived, was a lesson too dearly learnt to be ever again forgotten. It was the last time I yielded to the promptings of a passionate temper, though my untamed, hot blood led me afterwards through a course of reckless folly and into many a slough of sin and iniquity; but my after-experiences are not for your ears yet, my child,—I trust you may never need them. Perhaps you have cause to thank God that having made you *what* you are, you are safe from many temptations of manhood. Will you try and remember my warning tale, Charles, when you are provoked into passion as I was then, and as you were this morning?"

"I will, indeed, sir," said the boy, with tears in his eyes; "oh, what a dreadful thing it

would be to kill anybody ! how glad I am Rawlings did not die !”

“ He was merely stunned,” replied the Rector ; “ but that was by God’s mercy, and is no extenuation of my act.”

“ How did you get home from the field, before you had the fever, sir ?” asked young Herbert.

“ Finding I did not return home at night, they sent in search of me, but it was hours before they found me, lying with a burning fever in my veins, in a damp meadow among the long grass, with the cool summer rain soaking through my clothes. My mother came and nursed me through my illness, and when sufficiently recovered, took me home with her. I did not again return to my tutor’s, for during the next vacation my dear brother George was attacked by inflammation on the lungs, and died. I could not endure to go back again into Hants, where he had been associated with me, so my father himself prepared me for the University

of Oxford, at which I entered when I was eighteen.—Now, Charles, I must go out, and so will summon Bogue to take you home. Remember, my boy, with what object I have recounted this little episode in my life to you, and do not relate it to any one else.”

“May not Beatrice hear it, sir? I tell her everything,” said Charles, wistfully.

“Very well; since you so much wish it, and have not been in the habit of keeping a secret from your cousin, I absolve you from silence towards her,” replied Mr. Ravenscroft.

He then made the boy drink a glass of sherry and eat a piece of plum cake, in the manufacture of which luxurious edible some of the best children in the village testified to Mary’s proficiency. By the time this refreshment had been partaken of, the chair came round to the garden door, and Mr. Ravenshaw himself placed his little friend within it, walking by his side till they reached the park gates, where he left him to the care of Bogue, and then pursued his way

across the fields to visit the clergyman of a neighbouring village, who had established an excellent library for his parishioners, and from whom he wished to gain some hints as to the rules and regulations of a book-club, should he be able to carry out his cherished scheme of founding one for the poor of Hazelwood.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE UNINVITED GUEST.

“ Can it be no instinct dwells  
In the immortal soul which tells  
That thy love, oh, human brother,  
Is unwelcome to another ?”

ANON.

“ LISTEN, my dear, do I not hear the sound of the carriage-wheels ?” said Mrs. Herbert to her niece, as, to enjoy the cool breeze of the summer evening, they were pacing up and down the terrace-walk. It was the day upon which Mr. Herbert was expected to arrive, and the carriage had that afternoon been sent over to N—— to meet the train. Vane had impor-

tuned that he might take Stephen's place beside Gregory, the coachman. Charles was spending the day at the Parsonage, and Miss Vane and her aunt had thus been left some hours in uninterrupted tranquillity; they were now anticipating the termination of their *tête-à-tête*, and at Mrs. Herbert's exclamation they both paused to listen, but at that instant no other sound was audible, save the cawing of the rooks in the tall trees of the avenue, and the sougling of the soft wind in their giant branches.

"I begin to wish your uncle would come, Beatrice, I am so afraid of accidents on those railways," said Mrs. Herbert, in a low, anxious voice, still straining her ear to catch any distant sound.

"I am sure you need not be uneasy, aunt; it is but just six o'clock," replied Miss Vane, consulting the elegant little Geneva watch in her girdle; "and hush! you are right, I hear them opening the gates."

In another moment the carriage came sweep-

ing down the avenue. A face appeared at the window, and evidently descried the figures on the terrace, for presently another head became visible.

"There is some one with your uncle, Beatrice," exclaimed Mrs. Herbert.

"It is Vane, I suppose ; do you not remember he went with the carriage?"

"Yes ; but he is on the box beside Gregory, my dear. I wonder who it is."

Mrs. Herbert's curiosity was soon gratified for the carriage at this moment drew up before the Hall door, and after her husband stepped out their eldest son.

"How do you do, my dear ? looking all the better for country air, I see," said Mr. Herbert, kissing his wife. "Well, Beatrice ;"—bestowing an avuncular salute on the high white brow ;—"as pale as ever, my stately lady : I hope we've not kept dinner waiting ! the train was pretty true to its time ; but I've been half smothered during our drive

from N——, the roads so abominably dusty ; obliged to keep the windows shut all the way, faugh !” and with the air of a martyr, Mr. Herbert entered the house.

To a bystander, there was something peculiar in Miss Vane’s greeting to her eldest cousin ; it could scarcely be called “ a greeting,” for there was no “ welcome” in it. At first, she did not put out her hand ; but gave him a glance, in which enquiry and mistrust were mingled with repelling pride.

Beatrice looked a truly noble lady, strikingly handsome and majestic, as she stood on the broad white steps, her rich silk robe with its wide crape skirt falling in graceful folds around her tall, commanding figure. John Herbert sprang up the steps and took her hand in his, looking at her earnestly as he did so. A shade passed over his handsome, but not agreeable countenance, as he observed the expression upon his cousin’s face, and whispering in a low voice, inaudible to all but her whom he addressed—



"Your welcome is as cold as yourself, Beatrice;" he dropped her hand and hurried into the house.

She passed him as he was disembarassing himself of his travelling coat, and said, with emphasis—

"As my *cousin*, John Herbert, I bid you welcome to Hazelwood Hall." He merely bowed, but the blood mounted into his sallow cheek, and his lips curled slightly. Beatrice proceeded at once to the housekeeper's room.

"Mrs. Gould," she said, addressing a respectable widow of sixty, (whose daily avocations consisted in a strict surveillance over the upper chambers, and whose vicinity was usually indicated by the rustling of silk and the jingling of keys), "Mrs. Gould, I have one more visitor than I anticipated; will you be good enough to prepare the blue chamber in the east wing of the house for Mr. John Herbert, who has accompanied his father?"

As she was returning along the corridor, she met Vane in search of her.

"I say, Trissy, where is Jack to sleep? he wants to wash his hands before dinner."

"In the blue room, three doors from yours; Vane, go with your brother and see that he has all he requires—if there is anything wanting, ring for Stephen, and be as quick as you can, for it is nearly seven o'clock."

"My stars! the fish will be utterly spoilt, and I'm so hungry."

He was just running off when his cousin called him.

"Vane! is Charlie come home?"

"Don't know," was the curt reply, and in another instant the boy was beyond call.

They were all assembled in the drawing-room before the announcement of dinner, when the little lame child was carried in by Stephen to see his father.

"Why, my boy," said Mr. Herbert, taking him fondly on his knee, and stroking back his

soft light hair, "those eyes don't sparkle so in London; you only want a few roses here to look as hearty as your brothers!" and the father playfully pinched his little son's thin, wan cheeks.

"Oh, papa, I'm so happy here; don't take me away," whispered the child, leaning his head against his father's.

"But what does cousin Beatrice say? is she willing to keep you any longer?" replied Mr. Herbert with a smile.

"Indeed I am," answered Miss Vane. "I have always intended to beg that Charlie might be suffered to remain."

"I say, won't you keep me, too, Trissy?" cried Vane.

"No, young man," replied his father, "you will return with us on Monday, and the next visit you pay will be to Harrow."

Vane made a wry face, and muttered something about a "horrid bore," and at this moment dinner was announced.

"Then I may stay, dear papa?" pleaded a weak voice.

"Yes, my boy, you may," was the ready reply.

Nurse came for her young charge; Mr. Herbert offered his arm to his niece, to conduct her to the dining-room. Mr. John Herbert followed with his mother, and Master Vane brought up the rear. They left one happy little heart behind them as they passed through the great hall.

\* \* \* \*

That night, after Charlie had gone to bed, and Vane had gone—no one knew whither—Mrs. Herbert drew her chair close beside her husband's, (evidently, with the intention of having a conjugal *tête-à-tête*), and thus commenced:—

"I wish to speak to you, Charles, of a plan I have in my head about Charlie's education. Mr. Ravenshaw was talking to me about—"

"Who the deuce is Mr. Ravenshaw?" interrupted her husband, not very politely.

"Well, dear, I was going to tell you, if you'd given me time. Mr. Ravenshaw is the Rector of Hazelwood—he's a very sensible man, and has taken a great fancy to the child—"

"Ah! now I understand; but you began at the wrong end of the story, Lizzie; you should always explain who people are, before you quote them as an authority." And Mr. Herbert put his hand under his wife's round chin, and looked with an air of most provokingly amiable superiority into her blue eyes. But Mrs. Herbert was not to be propitiated.

"Oh, if you're going to cavil at my words in that manner, Charles, I sha'n't talk at all," she replied, with a little petulant jerk of the head.

"And so punish yourself, veriest of women and best of little wives? Will your ladyship have the goodness to proceed?"

Mrs. Herbert judged it best not to let the golden opportunity of this private conference

with her husband escape her, so she continued—

“Mr. Ravenshaw has taken great pains with poor Charlie since he has been here; the child goes to the Rectory nearly every day, and he reads a great deal with Mr. Ravenshaw, who says he is very clever, but too backward in his studies for his age. The other morning the Rector called on me, and said he hoped I should not consider it impertinent, but for the sake of the great interest he took in Charlie, forgive his asking what plan we meant to pursue with regard to his education.”

“I cannot think *that* is of much importance, crippled as he is,” replied her husband; “so long as he can read and write, it’s sufficient; his health will quite break down, and we shall lose him, if you force his intellect, Lizzie. Don’t have him teased with lessons, poor boy.”

“But they don’t tease him, Charles,” rejoined his wife; “he has been so much better and happier ever since he came here and the Rector

took him in hand ; his heart is quite set on books."

"Oh, that is another thing ; if he likes it, let him learn, and welcome," said Mr. Herbert ; "and as Beatrice wishes to keep him here a little longer, she and your paragon of clerical perfection may 'tutor' him between them, to his own and their heart's content."

"Yes, but he cannot stay here always, and afterwards—"

"Oh, sufficient unto the day—" Mr. Herbert began, but suddenly checked himself. "Did the Rector suggest anything ?" he added.

"Mr. Ravenshaw proposed that you should engage a gentleman both as tutor and companion, who could always be with him. He says he is too old for female care and tuition now, and I have sometimes thought he was getting beyond nurse's management ; but I have a better plan in my head if you will hear what it is, Charles."

Mr. Herbert nodded assent, and laying her hand on his arm, Mrs. Herbert continued,—

“ Since you say that Charlie may remain at Hazelwood, why not let him do so as Mr. Ravenshaw’s pupil instead of Beatrice’s guest ? I am sure it would be better for all parties.”

“ You jump rather hastily at conclusions, Lizzie : how do you know Mr. Ravenshaw wishes for a pupil ?—had he done so, he would probably have obtained one before this,” replied her husband, discouragingly.

Mrs. Herbert’s countenance fell—she was of a sanguine, hopeful temperament, and a wish with her was no sooner felt than realized ; however, in an instant, she looked up brightly again.

“ Why, Charles, he has not been long at Hazelwood, so has hardly had time to seek pupils, and I’m sure he would not refuse to take Charlie—he seems so fond of the boy ; but you’ll see Mr. Ravenshaw to-morrow. Beatrice has asked him to dine here after evening ser-



vice, and then you'll talk to him about it, won't you, dear?"

While the required promise was being coaxed out of Mr. Herbert, we will leave them to play the part of listener at another *tête-à-tête* that was being carried on in the embrasure of a window at the further end of the room. The evening was close and oppressive, and Miss Vane had gone thither to watch the summer lightning now flickering in the distant horizon. In a few minutes John Herbert awoke from the low couch upon which she had imagined him to be indulging in a siesta, and joined her in her vigil.

"Beatrice," he said, in a low voice, approaching his lips to her ear, "do you know what has brought me hither?"

There was a pause—the proud lips quivered.

"To show me that the past is forgotten, I imagine, as I desired it might be before we met again," answered his cousin, coldly.

"Not so, Beatrice; it rests with you to make

me forget it: a hope for the future only can enable me to do so."

"What! and has the talented, wealthy, and fashionable John Herbert come down hither to expose himself to the pain and humiliation of a second refusal?" asked Miss Vane, sarcastically.

"I came here, Beatrice, to pay you the highest compliment a man can offer to a woman. I did not expect to be met with insult;" and the young man's voice trembled, but from what emotion it was difficult to tell.

"John Herbert, once for all I tell you your presence here is most unwelcome while you cherish your present feelings towards me — feelings, that I told you once before, and now repeat, I cannot reciprocate; attentions cease to be flattering, when they become obtrusive. The day you first addressed me on this subject, I gave you a decided, but courteous refusal—it is neither gentlemanly nor considerate again to press your suit upon me."

“But what are your objections to me, Beatrice?” urged her cousin, pertinaciously.

“That is a question you have no right to ask,” replied Miss Vane, haughtily; “but since you *have* asked it, I will answer it. In the first place, we are cousins; this would be with me an all-sufficient barrier to our union, were there no other; but, secondly, you do not love me; and, thirdly, I do not love you. Now, are you satisfied, sir?”

“I should think my having offered myself as your husband is a sufficient proof of my regard for you, Beatrice; and when I ask you to be my wife, I tell you that I do not expect passionate demonstrations from you, therefore I shall not be disappointed at not receiving them. I know your nature, and, forgive me if I speak plainly, I should as soon think of exciting emotions in a pillar of salt or a block of marble; but from the time I became master of a house of my own, I mentally elected you as its mistress, and do not blame me if I cannot tamely

give up this dream, when its realization is so possible. Why will you not try and reconcile yourself to me as your husband?—I know you love no one else—be kind, Beatrice ; oh, yield, yield, my stately cousin ;” and with a smile at once self-confident and persuasive, which the darkness fortunately prevented her from seeing, he tried to possess himself of her hand ; but she drew herself up with stately dignity, and her large eyes were filled with such scorn, it was well for him the darkness veiled the fierce lustre, or he would have shrunk into very nothingness, before the anger and contempt which they expressed.

Ah ! John Herbert, grievously you mistook your cousin’s character when you called her “ a pillar of salt ;” there was fire enough in *her* heart to burn up a thousand like yours. You have now kindled a flame within it, (though not such as you wish), and will soon feel its scorching power. But it is for one nobler and greater than you will ever be, to bask in the

warmth of its yet unfelt passion—to sun himself in the glowing rays of its fire of love.

Miss Vane spoke. The words fell slowly and distinctly from her tongue, but there was evidently strife within her breast.

“ *You* know my nature?—Little you know of any ‘nature’ but your own—nay, you have no true estimate of that, self-worshipper! Will you force me to show you my heart, to cure you of your mad infatuation? then, so be it. John Herbert, I would not marry *you* to save myself from the most agonizing death—I should step into a living tomb the day I did so. As a boy I disliked you, as a man I simply despise you; for, as a boy, with all your talents and your handsome face, you were cold and selfish; as a man, you fully justify the promise of your boyhood. Content with a life of ease and luxury, you have striven neither to be ‘great nor good.’ You are not capable of strong passion, but you want a wife of whom you may be proud”—she coloured and substituted—“ who

will not disgrace you to sit at the head of your table and lean on your arm ; now, strange as it may seem to you, my requirements in a husband are somewhat similar. I, too, must be proud of the man to whom I give my hand ; I must feel and acknowledge his superiority, and shall certainly not select one who is my junior as my lord and master, unless gifted by nature with a superlative portion of wisdom and goodness. I neither bow to you as to a being of a higher stamp than myself, nor do I admire you, my good cousin. If I am a statue, you, John Herbert, are not the Pygmalion to warm me into life and love ;” and, with a contemptuous smile, Miss Vane turned away, leaving the young man to digest as he best could the wholesome wound his vanity had received.

“ Who was that closed the door ?” asked Mrs. Herbert. “ How dark it is. Shall I ring for the lamp, Beatrice ?”

“ Beatrice is not here, ma’am,” replied her eldest son. His voice was low and husky.

"Oh, I did not know you were there, John ; are you not afraid of sitting at that open window?" asked the anxious mother.

"I was watching the lightning, ma'am—it is very vivid"—but he closed the window as he spoke, and Stephen at that moment entering with the lamp, he made his exit from the room.

Soon afterwards, Vane came in with flushed cheeks, and hands hopelessly begrimed with tar. Beatrice, who had re-entered, asked him to hold a skein of silk for her while she wound it.

"My dear boy, I never saw such fingers! what have you been doing?—it's a fortunate thing my silk is brown," exclaimed his cousin, laughing.

"Oh, all serene, Trissy! it won't come off. That confounded ship of mine will let in the water, so I ran down to Brooks's for some tar, and I've been daubing it all over to stop the leak."

Mr. Herbert here began to read an article

from the "Times" aloud, so all conversation ceased for awhile.

About ten, a tray was brought in with cake and wine, which, after a late dinner, was all the supper they required, and then Vane was despatched in search of his elder brother; he soon returned with the intelligence, that "Jack was in his room, but the door was bolted, and he said he'd got a bad headache, and wasn't coming down again that night."

"Poor boy! he always suffered so from those nervous headaches; I dare say the journey caused it," said Mrs. Herbert.

Beatrice was at that moment pouring out a glass of wine, when her hand suddenly shook, and she spilt at least half on the cloth.

"Allow me, my dear niece—that decanter is too heavy for you," said her uncle, gallantly. "Why, Vane, my boy, you should not let your cousin do such things for herself; we must send you back to Harrow, to make a gentleman of you, and to learn politeness."



Vane swallowed his wrathful indignation and a large piece of sponge cake at the same time ; and, without incurring any further censures from his father, took himself off to bed. The rest of the party soon followed.

When in the solitude of her own chamber, Beatrice felt that her haughty temper had carried her beyond the bounds of propriety towards a guest ; but her aversion to her cousin's advances was so unconquerable, that regret at the unmistakeable manner in which she had *this* time repulsed them, could scarcely be said to be predominant within her breast.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

"The longing for ignoble things,  
The strife for triumph more than truth,  
The hardening of the heart that brings  
Irreverence for the dreams of youth."  
; LONGFELLOW.

JOHN HERBERT, although one of Dame Fortune's most favoured children, was greatly to be pitied. Nature had endowed him with fine abilities and a handsome person, and at sixteen he was his father's hope and pride. At Eton he was applauded by his masters, liked by his schoolfellows, and everywhere pronounced to be "a clever, gentlemanly youth." He was the especial favourite

of his paternal grandfather, the Earl of C——, who so doated on the boy, that at his death, which happened about that time, John Herbert found himself heir to a vast fortune. How, then, with all these attributes, all these advantages, came John Herbert to merit his cousin Beatrice's fixed antipathy and sweeping condemnation? Reader, it was well founded; Miss Vane had known him from boyhood, and held his character in its true estimate. She knew her cousin John to be essentially selfish. So long as he imagined that on his own talents and exertions depended his creating for himself a "name in the world," just so long did his brain labour and his tongue curry favour with those who might promote his advancement in life. But while to his superiors he was respectful and even obsequious, to his equals courteous and affable, Beatrice Vane, domesticated in her aunt's family as she had been, knew that to inferiors, or those in any way subordinate to him, he was often harsh and tyrannical, and

towards them at all times haughty and overbearing.

It may be alleged that our heroine herself has not been described as free from this failing ; but she erred in this respect rather from a native coldness of manner and lack of knowledge of those beneath her, than from any fault of heart ; therefore she was not one whit more tolerant of a want of consideration in others, since she was not conscious of the error in herself.

Up to the time of his grandfather's death, John Herbert had well maintained the fine character he aimed at being thought ; then, when the good opinion of the world was no longer needed to assist in his promotion, he suddenly threw off the mask ; his ambition silenced, he no longer sought to acquire fame as a student, or courted the favour of the rich as a stepping-stone to his own greatness ; he had attained his end without effort or trouble on his part ; what more did he want ? Nothing, bu

to sit down quietly and enjoy himself in selfish ease and luxury. He passed through his university career without disgrace, but without *éclat*, and then applied himself to the expenditure of his princely fortune.

His first proceeding was to form a separate establishment for himself in Park Lane, on a most magnificent scale; his equipages were among the handsomest; his horses among the finest, his entertainments among the largest and most costly in London. But there was no fear of John Herbert's foolishly wasting his income; he was much too careful for that: he did not spend a farthing in dissipation. Why should he gamble? he had as much money as he wanted—there was nothing to tempt him to the love of play. He had no cares to drown; the "juice of the grape" was no costly rarity to him, that he should indulge in it to excess. A refined sensualist, beauty, unaccompanied by purity, had no charms for him, hence was John Herbert safe from all temptation to vice. There

was but one thing wanting among John Herbert's household gods—it was an idol Mammon could not create for him—and this was a wife. Nature, when she formed him, had omitted that necessary organ of anatomy, a heart; but this *very* young man of the world, although he could not love, wished for a handsome dashing woman to preside at his dainty board, appear at his side in society, at the Opera, in the Parks, and to bring him an heir to his wealth; in fact, to add to his importance while he contributed to hers.

Who so fitting to fill this honoured post as his cousin Beatrice? And at her feet, without anticipating a rejection, about six months before, he had laid his splendid proposals. Miss Vane felt thunderstruck: she had been prepared by no lover-like attentions for this sudden offer; and what woman does not quickly perceive when a man truly and earnestly loves her? As we have stated, his overtures met with a positive refusal.

Mortified and offended, the rejected suitor had immediately started for the Continent, from whence he did not return until his cousin had taken up her residence at Hazelwood, when incurable vanity alone led him to follow her thither, and bring down upon "his devoted head" a second rejection.

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert were of course quite in ignorance of this state of things; young men do not always think it necessary to confide their *affaires de cœur*, or (as in John Herbert's case we should more properly style them) matrimonial speculations, to any one, least of all to their parents, especially when the issue is unfavourable.

Although we have presented John Herbert in an unprepossessing light to the reader, because a true one, he stood not so glaringly imperfect in the eyes of his family, who would have marvelled that their eldest son could have been thus lightly rejected.

Every one is acquainted with the old saw,

"It is a wise child that knows his own father ;" but we may venture to reverse the adage, and affirm, "It is a wise father that knows his own child ;" for assuredly if any eyes are blind to filial defects, both moral and physical, they are a parent's. Mr. Herbert said—

"John might have made more noise in the world, certainly, he was such a clever fellow, but what did it matter ? His fortune was ready-made for him ; and, after all, few young men, with his wealth and personal advantages, were so steady as John was."

With his mother he was a paragon ; perhaps not such a pet and favourite as Sydney or Vane, but then "he was so clever ; had such a clear head ;" so she went to him for advice in any emergency, and loved and admired her eldest born. His brothers valued him, not so much for himself as for their own interests. Sydney dined at his sumptuous table, danced at his balls, and sat in his box at the Opera ; Vane rode his horses, and received his "golden tips."



It was a fine thing to have such a rich elder brother ; and towards his own family John Herbert was not mean. He liked them better than any others in the world but himself, and they required nothing at his hands. Had they been needy, and if, to assist them, he must have denied himself one single article of luxury, or left ungratified the smallest want or desire, John Herbert would probably have closed his doors and steeled his breast against them. But they were also opulent, and he was proud of his father's name and distinction ; the greatness of his family reflected upon himself. So having wasted a chapter upon a selfish egotist, we will leave him, and treat of others more worthy the efforts of our pen.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE FAMILY PORTRAITS.

"All up and down the galleries  
Went the Lady Magdalene,  
A looking at the pictures old,  
That on the walls were seen."

MARY HOWITT.

THE next day Mr. Herbert was introduced to Mr. Ravenshaw, who, as his wife had foretold, made no objection to receiving Charlie as his pupil and an inmate of his house; but when Mrs. Herbert proposed that Nurse should remain to attend on the boy, the Rector decidedly opposed it. He stipulated that Charles should be left entirely under his care, promising

that he should have all the attendance he required; so Mrs. Herbert yielded the point. Other matters being satisfactorily arranged, it was settled that a box of clothes and books should be sent down for Charlie from London, and he was to quit Hazelwood Hall for the Rectory the following week.

By tacit consent Beatrice Vane and her cousin, John Herbert, avoided each other as much as possible during the one day they were compelled to pass under the same roof. On Monday afternoon, Beatrice, supporting Charlie in her arms, watched the luggage-laden travelling-carriage as it rolled down the avenue, bearing away in it her recent visitors.

“Are you sorry they’re gone, cousin Trissy?” asked the boy, looking wonderingly up, as a tear fell on his small white hand, from the large moist eyes into which he was now intently gazing.

“Yes, dear Charlie, I am very sorry; you know I always feel parting from your mother.

She has been like one to me, and I love her very dearly," was the reply.

"And do you love papa and John too?" he continued, with the pertinacity peculiar to children.

Miss Vane reddened, and bit her lip.

"Your father is very good, Charlie; you know that I care for him: why do you ask such foolish questions? I wonder, my dear little fellow, that you feel the separation from your home and friends so little as you appear to do."

"Well, I don't know, Trissy, why I should mind about it," said the boy, thoughtfully; "you see they don't understand me as you and Mr. Ravenshaw do; and though they're all very kind, yet somehow—you know what I mean, dear?—they don't think much of me. What am I but a poor little cripple? They can't be so proud of *me* as of Sydney and Vane."

There was so much truth and penetration in this speech, that Miss Vane was silenced; she only bowed her head until it leant against her

little favourite's, and touched his pale forehead with her lips.

"Don't hold me any longer, dear Trissy, I'm too heavy for you," he said, returning her caress; "and they're quite out of sight now—put both your arms round me, dear, and then I can drag myself to the sofa, or give me my crutches—I am so much stronger, I can use them now; indeed, I'm growing much too big and tall for you to carry. Oh, Trissy," he added, with a sigh, as she laid him on the couch, "it's a weary thing to be lame: forgive me if I am cross and wayward sometimes, it is so trying to be completely dependent on those about you."

"Don't say so, Charlie; I think it must be very sweet to depend on those we love; to owe our comfort, our happiness, to their tender, watchful care," replied Miss Vane, earnestly.

"Do *you* feel this, Beatrice? you, who are so proud and independent, could you bear to lean entirely on any one? Whom would you

allow to control your every action, above all, your every movement; why do you blush? Would you really not only submit to it, but do you wish for it, Beatrice?"

The colour had mounted to Miss Vane's face, and a strangely soft expression stole into her eyes.

"Yes, dear Charlie," she answered in a quiet tone, "I would not only 'submit' to control from one older and wiser, but I believe I would yield gladly and willingly to the discipline of a stronger and better will."

She turned her proud head aside, half ashamed of the confidence into which she had been betrayed; the sensitive, precocious boy understood her in an instant—a strange fire gleamed in his eyes.

"Oh, darling, darling Beatrice!" he exclaimed, catching her hand, "would that God had made me such a man, not for my own sake, but your's, dearest!"

"Do not wish it, my own boy, I should have loved you *too* well!"

She sunk on her knees by the side of the couch, and buried her face in his bosom ; then looking up suddenly, she exclaimed—

“Charlie ! grow a good, noble, wise man, for my sake !”

“I will ! I will, love, if my life is spared. Would you not like me to become just such a one as Mr. Ravenshaw ?” he asked eagerly ; “oh, but I never can be such a fine character—and then I am a cripple,” he added despondingly.

“Is Mr. Ravenshaw so *very* perfect, do you think, Charlie ?” asked his cousin curiously.

“I don’t know whether you’d call him ‘perfect,’ dear,” he answered ; “but he has such a noble way of speaking and thinking, Trissy—I’ll repeat to you a little story he told me about himself the day I went into that great passion with you ; he said I might tell you, but no one else.”

Here followed the narration with which our reader is acquainted. When it was concluded Miss Vane sat perfectly still, and looked thought-

ful ; but her enthusiastic companion required some comment, some response to his reiterated encomiums on his friend, and was half disappointed when his cousin simply replied, in answer to his impatient questioning—

“ Mr. Ravenshaw is not by any means perfect, you see, Charles ; but he is a good man, you could not have a better model to graft your own character upon !”

“ You should not say that, Trissy, I don’t think it’s quite right,” said the boy uneasily. “ Mr. Ravenshaw told me, one day, when I said I should imitate him, that I ought not to make any human being my standard of imitation, for that we should follow in Jesus Christ’s footsteps, and none other.”

Beatrice looked surprised.—religious feeling rarely tempered even Charlie’s discourse ; it was a subject so seldom dwelt on amongst them, that the mention of that sacred name brought a stillness and constraint between them.

“ Charlie, don’t talk any more, you begin to



look pale," she said, after a pause; "lie still, and read your book; I must now leave you for a little while, but we will have an early tea together."

"Oh, how delightful; but you've not dined, Trissy?"

"Yes, I made my dinner as you did, at luncheon."

As she was leaving the room, Charles exclaimed—

"I say, Trissy, is it not a blessing to get rid of nurse?"

She only smiled, and with a sigh of intense relief the boy turned himself round on the sofa and opened his book.

His cousin was not absent for more than twenty minutes, and soon after she returned to the room they sat down to tea together. It was a very cozy meal, and Charlie did full justice to the hot buns. He had not looked so well for a long time as he did on that evening. Perfect happiness of mind leaves its stamp of

brightness and beauty upon the countenance, and he was so full of enjoyment at his new mode of life as to be very unwilling to allow that bedtime was drawing near; but his old childish opposition had been discontinued for some time, and Beatrice reminded him that the morrow would but dawn under pleasant auspices, while to enjoy it thoroughly, he must have his usual term of repose.

“Then, Trissy, you must sing me one song, and after that I’ll go to bed,” said the boy.

Miss Vane instantly moved to the piano and complied with his request; she selected a simple, touching ballad, and her heart went with her voice, as it ever did when she sang to those she loved; but the strain came to an end, and then Beatrice rang the bell.

“Mrs. Gould will sleep in the next room to you, Charlie, as nurse did, and she will give you a hand-bell to ring in the night if you want anything.”

Stephen entered.

“Carry Mr. Charles to his room, Stephen, and attend on him. Good night, dear boy.”

\* \* \* \*

When left alone, Miss Vane felt the absence of her relations very much. She missed her aunt's kind, motherly, cheerful face and voice, doubly dear to her because so like her father's, and her cousin Vane's merry laugh. Vane Herbert was Sir Harley's godson, and not unlike what his uncle had been in his younger days. On this account, as well as on the score of his own boyish attractions, Vane stood high in his cousin's favour.

Who does not know the difficulty of again settling down to any ordinary avocation, when for some time the regular routine of one's life has been broken up by a house full of guests or any other exciting cause? Miss Vane suffered from this feeling of indolence and reaction most intensely, when she found herself for the first time alone after being surrounded for many weeks by relations and

friends who had drawn her out of herself, and made her for a little while forget that she lived alone in the world, unblessed by those near ties that make home so happy. This must be a depressing consciousness to all young persons of strong feelings, who, although possessed of boundless wealth, and all the importance that rank and station can give, have lost their natural prop in this world, a parent's protection and love.

This evening, Beatrice betook herself to the picture gallery. It was a passage of some length, and lighted by a row of lamps suspended from the ceiling. As she stood there, gazing on the portraits of her predecessors, painted in ancestral gradation from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, ending with her own noble father, she looked a worthy descendant of her ancient race : those grim old barons and powdered dames would not have scorned to claim as kindred that tall and graceful lady with her richly flowing robes, and pale, chiselled features.

Our heroine paused some time before two of these paintings ; one was that of the " Lady Edith Vane," date 1665, whom she herself was said to resemble ; the other was that of her own dear mother in her bridal dress, looking sadly and sorrowfully out from her gilded frame at the daughter upon whom her eyes had been permitted to dwell for so short a time on earth. Beatrice had learnt from her aunt what that tragedy had been that had darkened her mother's wedded life, and ultimately brought her to an early grave. And here we will enlighten the reader on the dark story hinted at by old Thomas in our opening chapter.

Her father and her mother had been cousins, and I wish we *could* stigmatise as an idle superstition the belief in the frequent misery and calamity that follow an alliance between such close relations ; but the evil results in these instances are too frequently brought before us to admit of our doing so. Harley Vane had a brother one year younger than himself, and although

much resembling him in appearance, not at all like him in character ; for while Harley, though of a quick, impetuous temper, was noble and unselfish, Sydney was selfish, violent, and ungovernable in his passions.

Different as their tastes and dispositions were, these young men both attached themselves to their cousin Beatrice Waldegrave, who had been much associated with them in their childhood, and who was no less remarkable for her beauty than for the excellence of her disposition.

Beatrice, in her turn, loved both her cousins ; but, with a perversion of taste common to those whose hearts are full of passionate feelings, the less perfect Sydney gained her warm affection, while the far more estimable Harley was forced to content himself with such a proportion as a sister might give to a brother. Beatrice Waldegrave's love could not be bought—she chose freely her cousin Sydney, with his younger son's portion, in preference to the heir of a large estate and fortune.

Sydney Vane, notwithstanding the defects in his character, was most attractive ; and when he relaxed in his proud dignity, and exerted himself to fascinate, his success was certain. A mutual passion had existed between Beatrice and Sydney from their earliest youth — one of those wild, unaccountable fascinations, which can only be utterly extinguished with life ; and here there seemed no barrier to their union.

The lot that awaited Miss Waldegrave would have been anything but enviable, had not the profligacy of her future husband been brought to light before her marriage. It appeared hardly credible when contrasted with the evident and daily increasing devotion he manifested towards his promised bride ; but, as after-events proved, in this strange conduct were the germs of insanity.

Beatrice, proud and strong in her sense of outraged honour and purity, cancelled her engagement, and this brought the already depraved

young man to the lowest abyss of vice and wretchedness. He reduced himself below pity; his family cast him off; there was but one with whom he dare secretly and rarely hold any intercourse, and this was his sister Lizzie, afterwards Mrs. Herbert; from her he could hear of the one whose innocent love he had forfeited for ever, and to whom he was still madly attached.

But we are making too long a story of what is, after all, a mere retrospect. Suffice it to add, that Miss Waldegrave's heart was not one to go long unmated. In a short time she forgot the baseness of her former lover, and, although the passion of her heart was blighted, found sincere comfort and pride in the excellence and sterling worth of her affianced Harley.

Most anxious was she to atone for the injustice she had done her elder cousin, and the pain she had made him suffer, and he was only too content to be permitted to console the woman he so fondly idolized for the bitter disappointment she had undergone. Harley Vane



had a strong, enduring, faithful affection for his cousin Beatrice—it was scarcely a passion, for it had “grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength,” and known no accession or diminution.

Their marriage took place at Llanesk, in North Wales, the residence of Sir Philip Waldegrave, the bride’s father ; but the solemnity of the ceremony was disturbed by the sudden entrance of a young man, with dusty and disordered travelling dress. His hair was uncombed and shaggy, while his large blue eyes gleamed with an unnatural fire.

As the bridal pair at the altar met his view, he rushed towards them with a wild shriek, but ere he reached them, threw his arms violently up, and fell on his face to the ground. It was the unhappy Sydney ; he had seen the ring slipped over the finger of her who had once been his own betrothed, and from that time became a raving maniac. In his affliction, the tenderness of his parents revived, and they would

not for a moment entertain the notion of his becoming an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

The old baronet resided principally either at his house in London, or on his estate at Fair Oaks, in W——shire, giving up the estate of Hazelwood to Harley and his bride. To Fair Oaks his unfortunate son was removed, and placed under medical treatment and restraint, but from some neglect of proper precaution, he contrived, within a year, to end his miserable existence. The father was spared the shock of this intelligence; death had removed him some months before his wretched son, but the news reached Hazelwood just as Lady Harley's confinement was daily anticipated; and her husband being in town on business for a day or two, she opened the letter which announced the horrible catastrophe.

Lady Harley Vane had never recovered the severe shock which the sudden appearance of her former lover on her wedding day had given her. She was haunted by a gnawing remorse that *she* had reduced him to that fearful condi-

tion, and an end that she had never anticipated ; and she was ever haunted by the spectre of a madman pointing at her with ghastly reproach, when she would fain have reciprocated the fond caresses and untiring love, of her noble, forbearing, and pitying husband. For most sincere was Sir Harley's sympathy and compassion for his wife ; although himself of so buoyant a nature that, happy in the possession of the woman he adored, he soon rose above the pain his brother's affliction at first caused him. But his delicate wife sunk beneath this second rough stroke on the chord already so sensitive. She gave birth to a daughter, and drooped and died within a few days afterwards.

The Dowager Lady Vane could not survive this succession of calamities in her declining years, and soon shared her husband's grave. Sir Harley was for a long while utterly prostrated by these family troubles. Fair Oaks, a magnificent, but recently-purchased estate, was sold as utterly uninhabitable by any of the family

after the recent scenes of horror, and bought by a rich German Baron, ignorant of, or indifferent to, the horrid deed recently committed there, which could not exceed the traditions of his own fatherland in romance and tragic import.

Hazelwood was shut up, and the bereaved Baronet, with his infant daughter, and a part of his establishment, betook himself to the continent. Through the beneficial effects of constant change of scene, and in the endearments of his little girl, Sir Harley partially regained his spirits ; but he was too genuine an Englishman thoroughly to conform to foreign customs and manners ; his heart yearned after his only remaining relative, his sister, Mrs. Herbert, and before his little daughter had attained her twelfth year, he returned to his native country, and took a house in the great metropolis.

Here Beatrice had been educated, introduced (under her aunt's auspices), and finally became the stately lady we have represented her to the reader ; when (after her father's death, for which

she was not altogether unprepared, as he had laboured for a year or two under a severe and increasing internal disease), she took upon herself the position of lady of Hazelwood Hall.

## CHAPTER XII.

## AN IMPRESSION.

“If the ill spirit have so fair a house,  
Good things will strive to dwell with 't.”

TEMPER.

“But Lancelot mused a little space.  
He said, ‘She has a lovely face,  
God in his mercy lend her grace.’”

TENNYSON.

EARLY in the following week Charlie Herbert left the Hall for the Parsonage. Beatrice missed her favourite little companion very much at first ; but so convinced was she that it would materially benefit the boy to be entirely under Mr. Ravenshaw's eye and tuition, that she would not even propose to her aunt and uncle that he

should remain under her roof, and continue his visits to the Rector daily, although at one time the feasibility of this scheme occurred to her, and her own heart dictated it.

Miss Vane was now left entirely alone to find resources within herself for the occupation of her time, and her days passed in the ordinarily trifling amusements of ladies of rank and fashion. We are sorry if we disappoint the reader in thus depicting a heroine, whose mind and character are not more above the level of human kind. But as we paint from life, so we feel bound in honour to ourselves to adhere as nearly as possible to truth and nature; and we must confess that Miss Vane's tastes and mode of life were very similar to those of most young ladies brought up in fashionable London society. She detested "plain work," (it is much to be doubted if, since the days of her pupilage, she had ever practised the art of hemming, sewing, whipping, and felling;) and she liked fancy work. Sundry elegant pieces of embroidery or

worsted work were left unfinished to commence a bead mat or some other trifling article that pleased her for the moment, and which was probably, in its turn, cast aside. She read all the new novels, and—but we dare not proceed, lest our sober, right-minded readers should fling down our book in disgust: that they may bear with us to the end, we must tell them that our heroine was far from happy or content with her frivolous existence. There was a capability in her for higher things, and she felt that it was so; but she had been educated for a “fine lady,” and could no more change her nature without some powerful agent to work the revolution, than the chrysalis can change into the moth until warmth has given to it a new strength and a fresh existence.

We have begged forbearance for our fair Beatrice’s frivolity, we must now claim it for her pride. She had to struggle against the disadvantages of a fashionable education. With her, to be *poor* was to be vulgar; she had seen and



shrunk from beggars in London, and she had no idea that the needy could be objects of interest or pity, could require more at her hands than silver and gold. She wanted some "stronger and wiser will," indeed, as she had once told Charlie, to give her mind a bias; to lead, teach, control her. By one whom she loved and respected Beatrice's was a nature that might be easily tamed and powerfully influenced; but where could one be found brave and loving enough to penetrate through that icy veil, tear it aside, and boldly lay siege to the precious casket hidden within? Beatrice had never loved, and was too apt to curl her haughty lip in disbelief of pure, faithful affection.

This is a dangerous incredulity, which often takes strong root in the bosoms of men and women of the world. In both it is equally pernicious, for in man it is apt to give rise to the suspicion that their knowledge of those who were created for their help and comfort has been among the lowest grade, or if not originating

from this cause, almost inevitably leads to it, and the consequent degradation of man to the level of the beast; while in woman, it freezes up the channel of the warm true affections, her greatest charm, and warps the character of many an one who would otherwise have made an excellent wife and mother.

But to return to Miss Vane, who is seated in the drawing-room, with a partially-embroidered collar in her hand, while the needle is idle in her fingers. It is a bright sunny day, but a soft breeze stirs the tops of the trees, and the sky is blue, flecked with little white clouds. Beatrice rises from the sofa with something between a sigh and a yawn, and walking to the window, looks out.

How beautiful it is! it seems wrong to stay in doors. How shall she while away the afternoon? She has soon decided—she will order the carriage—call at the Parsonage for Charlie, and take him for a drive with her. Her absolute and imperious will is no sooner

resolved than acted upon, and in less than half-an-hour, elegantly and fashionably attired (for whether in country lanes or city parks Miss Vane is never otherwise), she is reclining in an open chariot, and whirling through the village to the Rectory. In her proud indifference, she does not see either the lowering faces that peep at her from the cottage windows, or the wistful looks full of disappointment that follow her from the eyes of the humble poor, by whose very threshold she sweeps so proudly. She does not once give a kindly glance or patronising bow to her tenants as she passes them, but yielding to her habitual reserve and arrogance, averts her eyes, that she may not have to respond to the low curtsy, or meet the earnest and reproachful gaze she must know will follow her from those whose regard she should have sought to gain, not only by deeds, but by kindly words.

Mr. Ravenshaw was just leaving the Parsonage by the wicket-gate as the elegant equipage

of the lady of Hazelwood drew up before it; the splendid horses restively tossing their arched necks, and champing their bits, at the sudden check they received.

The Rector came to the carriage-door, as Miss Vane bent towards him, for a moment uncovering his head as she addressed him.

"Charles is within," he replied, in answer to her enquiry; "and I am very glad you have called for him, Miss Vane. My persuasions were useless to induce him to leave his book; yours may, perhaps, prevail. Allow me to assist you to alight."

And Mr. Ravenshaw extended his hand, while Stephen flung down the carriage steps. They found the young student on the sofa, as the Rector had predicted, deep in his book; but he threw it down when his cousin entered and his eyes sparkled.

"I have come to run off with you, dear boy, for this evening, if Mr. Ravenshaw will spare you. I am quite tired of being alone," she exclaimed,

as she bent down and kissed him. "You must come out for a drive with me; and it will do you good, dear Charlie. You cannot think how I have missed you."

Her tone was so unusually soft and gentle that Mr. Ravenshaw felt himself irresistibly attracted—the impression made on him by Beatrice Vane the first Sunday he had beheld her in Hazelwood Church, and since effaced by her pride and coldness, was again revived. She suddenly looked up, and coloured slightly, as she encountered the Rector's grave dark eyes fixed intently upon her.

"There is good in this woman yet!" was the extent of his reflection, after he had watched the carriage roll away from his gates, and was pursuing his way through the village. "There is much good in Beatrice Vane; her character is worth studying—where the affections are so concentrated and predominant—where the warm feelings so plainly indicate their workings in the countenance—the soul within

cannot be without strong energies, although they may be dormant—good impulses, that may, from education or the force of circumstances, have become perverted.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### STEPHEN IN DISGRACE.

“Beware of the hater in his coolness : for he meditateth evil against thee—commanding the sources of his mind, calmly to work thy ruin.”

“Deceit and treachery skulk with hatred.”

TUPPER.

ONE fine bright evening, about seven o'clock, Beatrice Vane was standing at the open window of the drawing-room. The sun was just setting, and cast a brilliant glow over the whole scene, tinting the tops of the tall trees with a golden tinge. There was a tame robin on the grass plat outside, hopping about fearlessly to pick up the crumbs she had just scattered for him from

the dinner-table. "Bobby," as she called him, had become a daily pensioner, and regularly appeared, morning and evening, for the meal he never failed to receive. When he had concluded his repast, he would testify his gratitude to his benefactress for her bounty by perching on a small shrub close by, and trilling one of his sweetest lays. Perhaps a share of the gratitude was due to Master Vane for having spared him when a callow nestling in the shrubbery, to enjoy a life of freedom. He was now warbling until his tiny throat appeared as though it would crack, when Miss Vane turned her eyes from her little pensioner and descried a dark object advancing down the avenue; a few more paces, and she distinguished the Rectory chair; and, stepping from the window, walked to meet her young cousin.

"I've come to have my tea with you, Trissy," said the boy; "because Mr. Ravenshaw's sent for in a hurry to baptise Mrs. Brooks's baby; and then he thought he might be detained, or



go on somewhere else—so he told me to come to you, if you'll keep me for an hour, dear?"

"I'm very glad to have your company," replied his cousin. "You know you're always welcome, Charlie."

When they reached the hall door, Miss Vane rung for Stephen to carry Charles Herbert into the drawing-room, for the boy's frame was too weak to admit of his using his crutches in ascending steps or any elevation—but, instead of the footman, old Waklyn appeared.

"Where is Stephen?" asked Miss Vane. "It would tax your strength too much, Waklyn, to lift Mr. Charles, I am afraid. Desire Stephen to come here."

"He's just stepped out, Miss," said the old man, respectfully. "I think I could assist Master Charles."

"Did I understand you to say Stephen was out? He has no business from home at this time in the evening, when I am likely to require his services. Have you desired him to go any-

where, Waklyn? Of course, you know where he is?"

"No, I don't, ma'am," replied the old butler, nervously; for he saw a storm gathering on his young lady's countenance. Waklyn was a timid, mild-spoken old man. He had not only lived with Sir Harley Vane, but with the old Baronet, his father; and knew well the hot blood of the family, and that his young mistress's veins had received a strong current of it. He and Bogue together carried the young cripple into the drawing-room, and laid him on the sofa, and Waklyn hoped the thunder-cloud had passed over; but, as they turned to leave the room, Miss Vane said:—

"Directly Stephen comes in, send him to me, Waklyn."

"Yes, ma'am; but please, ma'am—" and the old man hesitated.

"Well, Waklyn, what do you wish to say?" asked Miss Vane, in a tone anything but encouraging.

“I was going to say, ma’am, you won’t be hard upon Stephen; he’s young, you see, ma’am’ and——”

“That will do, Waklyn—you may go; you should know by this time that I never suffer one servant to intercede for or attempt to excuse another. What I require of them is, that they should each conscientiously discharge the duties I engage them to fulfil, and if they do not, they must abide the consequences. Send Stephen to me, as I desired you.”

The butler stole softly from the room with the aspect of a dog who has been chastised for some misdemeanour he has unwittingly committed, for old Waklyn was one of those sympathetic souls who make the troubles of others their own.

Charles Herbert’s eyes had been fixed on his cousin while she was speaking; he now exclaimed—

“Oh, Trissy, if you could but have seen yourself—how grand you looked while you were

talking just now ! I don't wonder you frightened poor Waklyn ; you were just for all the world like a tragedy queen, waving your hand with such an air, and just tapping on the floor with your little foot ; where did you learn those theatrical gestures ? I'm sure you must have been a pupil of the great Mrs. Siddons."

"Don't talk nonsense, dear boy — I am vexed," replied Miss Vane, in a tone of annoyance ; "Stephen is very idle—this is not his first offence."

"*That* was not such a very heinous one, Trissy, if no worse than this ;" then seeing his cousin's brow still clouded, he changed the subject. "Trissy, Mr. Ravenshaw's coming for me to-night ; shall you be glad to see him ?"

"Yes, dear, of course, he is so very kind to you. I cannot help liking him for your sake."

"Not a bit for his own, eh, Trissy ?" asked the boy, archly.

There was no answer, but the slightest possible

tinge of colour rose to Miss Vane's cheek, and she rang the bell to hasten tea.

\* \* \* \*

"I wonder Mr. Ravenshaw has not come by this time; it is getting quite dark," said Charles, as Waklyn came in to close the shutters.

"It is not very late, dear, the clock has but just struck nine," answered his cousin. "Has not Stephen returned?" she continued, addressing the butler.

"I've not seen him, ma'am," was the low reply.

"Prevarication!" muttered Miss Vane, and her eye flashed; but it was much too long a word for poor Waklyn's comprehension, so, had it reached his dulled ears, it would have failed to hurt his feelings.

"Trissy, come and lay your head down on my shoulder like you used to do," said Charlie; "sit on this footstool, dear; there, now I can talk to you as I wish to do."

The proud head bowed itself at this loving

summons, and the two cousins, so utterly different, yet so fondly attached, linked themselves in a gentle embrace.

"Did you know Brooks's baby was so ill, Beatrice? they don't think it will live," said Charles, "the child of those people that keep the shop."

"Poor little creature!" replied his cousin.

"Poor parents, you should rather say, Trissy it will be the second they've lost."

"You seem to know a great deal about the villagers, Charlie" said his cousin, in surprise.

"Of course I do; I often go and see them with Mr. Ravenshaw. I love it—oh, Trissy! it is so beautiful to hear him talk to them, and they're all so fond of him; I believe they think him an angel on earth, and so do I sometimes; I don't believe there's another man in the world like him; and I only know if I'd been *his* son, I should be a very different fellow to what I am. He seems to make me ashamed of having a bad thought, and I really don't think anything mean, or base, or vile could live near

him. Trissy, I can't tell you what I feel for him ; and oh ! I can do nothing to show it."

"Don't excite yourself—lie still, dear Charlie, you must not talk about Mr. Ravenshaw any more now."

"Well, then, Trissy, do let me talk to you about some of the poor people, there's a dear, for they're all so kind to me ; and there's one old woman, Sarah Powley, she comes out as I go by, and gives me the prettiest flowers in her garden ; and they all seem so sorry for me that I'm lame and can't run about like other boys. I was waiting at the school-house door, the other day, for Mr. Ravenshaw, who had gone in, and there was such a pretty little girl sitting upon the step, knitting with gay-coloured wools. I asked her what she was making, and she opened her apron and showed me some worsted balls ; they were so pretty, and I was just admiring them and learning how she made them, when Mr. Ravenshaw and the schoolmistress came out. I asked her how she could afford to buy

the wool, and she told me they were odds and ends Mrs. Brooks had given her. Well, just as we were going on, the dear little girl jumped up at the side of my chair, and blushing very much, thrust the smartest of her balls into my hand, saying, 'Have this, sir; do, please.' The schoolmistress frowned at her, and I heard her whisper, 'Don't you know the young gentleman's lame, Jenny, and can't play with it?' The poor little thing's face came all over crimson, and her eyes were quite full of tears, till I said, 'Though I can't play at ball, Jenny, I will take this and keep it because it is your work—thank you, it is very pretty.' Well, then, Trissy, she looked quite bright again. Oh, I could tell you such a number of stories about the people to show you how good they are, but it's no use talking to you, for you don't know any of them; and indeed, Trissy, I think it very wrong of you not to visit them, and so I know does Mr. Ravenshaw."

At this unlucky moment the Rector entered—



to receive the coldest and stiffest of salutations, from the haughty lady, who had just learnt that he presumed to censure her conduct, but he noted it not; his senses were absorbed in the recollection of the pretty yet evidently unstudied tableau he had surprised, when at his entrance Miss Vane gently removed the caressing arm that encircled her neck, and rose to receive him. He drew a chair up beside them, and in the easy, natural manner, peculiarly his own, made them insensibly fall again into unrestrained conversation. It is scarcely necessary to add, that Miss Vane now took a seat upon the sofa beside her cousin, instead of resuming her kneeling posture.

“Have you been telling your cousin, Charlie, of your conquest over the heart of old Sally Powley?” asked the Rector, with a smile.

“Yes, sir; I was saying to Beatrice how kind all the people were to me, and I had just told her about little Jenny and the ball, when you came in.”

"Did you know, Miss Vane, that Sarah Powley's husband was a gardener at the Hall during your father's lifetime?" asked the Rector.

"No, I did not. Are they very poor?" was the answer.

"Not particularly so; they are frugal old people, and Thomas has an acre or two of ground, which is very profitable to him; then they have no family to support."

"But they have claims on me for past services to our family. Is there nothing I can do to better their condition?"

"I scarcely think there is, Miss Vane, for they are above accepting money."

"Go and see them, Trissy," suggested Charlie.

The Rector looked down and said nothing.

"No," replied his cousin, "that would be departing from my rule; if I visited at one cottage I must at all, and I could not involve myself in this unpleasant task. I am neither

fitted by nature nor education for a district visitor."

"Possibly not," said Mr. Ravenshaw, gravely ; "yet the duties of man to man admit of no distinction or reservation. There is a charity of the heart as well as a charity of the hand, Miss Vane. You may evade a moral or religious law as you could not do a civil one ; but one thing is certain, God has appointed you a guardian to the poor, or He would not have placed you in your present position."

"Indeed, Trissy, they're not like the London poor," persevered Charlie ; "of course, dear, you couldn't go into their filthy hovels to run the risk of catching all manner of complaints and meeting with countless disagreeables ; but here every cottage is as clean as a palace, with its white-washed walls and scrubbed deal tables ; then the old women wear such snowy aprons, and even the children have clean faces. Oh, Trissy ! it's beautiful to go and see them ; and when you hear them say, ' God bless you, sir, or ma'am,'

as you come away, you feel how happy you have made them, and with how little trouble to yourself."

Miss Vane gave a short sarcastic laugh, but it was to conceal the emotion the boy's words had excited, as she said—

"Really, Mr. Ravenshaw, your pupil is becoming quite a young enthusiast."

"My pupil is becoming all I could wish to see him, Miss Vane," replied the Rector, bending fondly over the boy, and laying his hand on the small head; "I do not wish to fit him for earth, but for heaven; and," he added sternly, "those who would counteract any influence working for good within his young spirit, who would check this ardent seeking after true charity and holiness here, commit a grievous sin, one for which they will some day be called on to render an account."

Miss Vane looked mortified at the Rector's words—she knew for whom the reproof was intended, and at the same time that she felt her own

sarcastic remark had justly called it forth, her heart acquitted her of deserving it entirely ; she knew that, faulty as she might herself be—(a consciousness that had more fully presented itself to her since she became acquainted with Mr. Ravenshaw)—proud and worldly as was her own heart, she had never exercised any influence over her young cousin but what she felt was for his good. She never wished to make him what she was. Involuntarily she raised her sweet brown eyes to the Rector's face—she meant to speak, but a choking sensation prevented her.

“If you mean by what you said to blame Trissy, sir,” cried Charles, “you are quite wrong, for though she did speak strangely just now, she is very good, and never tries to lead me away from what is right ; besides, she says she wishes I could grow just such a man as you are, only, of course, I shall never be able to do my duty so actively !”

Mr. Ravenshaw had met that humbled glance upturned to his face, and had been touched by

the wounded feeling it expressed ; it pained him to be harsh or severe to any one—above all, to a woman—and he was so far human as to be irresistibly worked upon by the spell of beauty. The speech in which her young cousin had defended her, and its saving clause, had brought the colour to her cheek, and the pride back again to Beatrice's heart.

“ If I have wronged you, Miss Vane, forgive me,” said the Rector ; “ but, indeed, you yourself are to blame for it ; we have at least one interest in common ;” and he looked with a gentle smile at Charlie, which then transferred itself to her face, as he added—“ Extend your hand to me in token that my harsh judgment is forgiven, and may difference of opinion never alter friendship !”

She only half extended her fingers to meet his proffered grasp ; but they were taken in a clasp as strong and warm as hers was cold. That pressure left a magnetic warmth behind it that never passed away.

\* \* \* \*

Shortly afterwards, her guests took their leave. It was a bright starlight night, and Beatrice remained standing on the doorstep watching their receding figures, until a voice behind her caused her to start and look round—it was Stephen.

“I understood you wished to speak with me, ma’am.”

“Have you but just returned?” asked his mistress.

“I’ve been in this half hour,” replied the young man, rather sulkily.

“Then why did you not come to me directly, as I desired?” asked his mistress haughtily.

“I wern’t a going to be talked to afore that parson,” muttered Stephen.

“It was not my intention to rebuke you before Mr. Ravenshaw, Stephen; but I particularly desired that you should not leave the hall, unless at my express command, after dusk. As it is the second time you have ventured to disregard my wishes on this subject, and have added to disobedience the additional offences of impertinence

towards me and disrespect to your clergyman ; you will oblige me by quitting my service at the end of a month, and during that time, remember your character depends upon your conduct."

Miss Vane swept by the man with her haughtiest air, and passed on to the drawing-room ; she had not observed him to be under the influence of drink ; but, with an inflamed face and unsteady gait, he went in the opposite direction, muttering words that it was quite as well should not reach her ears, or they would have inevitably insured his instantaneous and summary dismissal. Miss Vane, nurtured in luxury and refinement as she had been, was too unused to witness the effects of drunkenness to detect them in Stephen's voice and manner ; but she had had reason to suspect his conduct was not altogether what it should be, and had therefore sought for a fit occasion on which to give him notice to quit her service. The present offence, aggravated by his insolence, was not to



be overlooked ; so she had availed herself, unhesitatingly, of this opportunity to dismiss him, and now sat down at her piano, perfectly unconscious that beneath her own roof imminent danger threatened her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS.

“And the mother gave, in tears of pain,  
The flowers she most did love :  
She knew she could find them all again,  
In the fields of light above.”

LONGFELLOW.

A FORTNIGHT has waned since our last chapter, unmarked by any momentous event beyond the ordinary routine of village life. Mr. Ravenshaw had performed the last sad rite over the corpse of the little child whom he had so recently baptised, as an “heir of everlasting salvation ;” but before the sods were trampled over the small mound of earth, the infant’s loss was well nigh

forgotten, save by the sorrowing parents. Poor as they were, they remembered not that there would be one mouth less to feed ; but their hearts yearned after their little lost one—their ears missed that plaintive, feeble cry now stilled for ever—and a tiny sock or shoe would revive in the mother's bosom her bitter loss, and produce a burst of uncontrollable agony, during which all her other little ones' caresses and childish endearments failed to console her.

\* \* \* \*

“ Is no one at home ? Mrs. Brooks, are you upstairs ? ” called the Rector in a loud voice, as one appeal at the shop bell, and two or three sharp raps on the counter with the handle of his umbrella had failed to elicit any recognition of his presence there from the proprietors of the store.

But now a quick pit-a-pat followed the Rector's audible questions, and a chubby little boy in a rusty black frock, and tolerably clean

pinafore, but whose face bore the traces of tears and dirty fingers, let himself cautiously down step by step till he reached the top of the last flight of stairs, at the bottom of which Mr. Ravenshaw stood. He then paused, and put his finger shyly to his mouth.

“Come here, Johnny—you’re not afraid of me, my little man,” said the Rector, in the kind, persuasive tones he always used towards children, and which irresistibly gained him their good will and confidence.

“Where’s daddy? Mammy thought he was below, and, ’deed, sir, she can’t come—poor mammy’s a fretting sadly!” and the little chest heaved as the child came slowly down, and while he gave utterance to the above simple speech, looked pleadingly into the Rector’s eyes. He saw something there that impelled him to thrust his little hand into Mr. Ravenshaw’s, as he said —“coom’ oop, will ’e? you used to do mammy good when baby was a dying, and you coom’d to see her; she’s frettin’ now, ’cos he’s gone

away, and Polly and Tommy and I can't comfort her nohow ; do 'e coom, sir, she don't seem to mind us a bit, and I can't bear to see mother take on so !"

The Rector instantly yielded to the little boy's entreaty, and to expedite the proceeding, lifted the now sobbing child in his strong arms and bore him up the narrow staircase. In obedience to the direction of Johnny's little finger, the Rector entered a low, meanly-furnished, but not squalid room, where, by the side of a four-post bed, surrounded by dingy green hangings, on a low chair, sat the bereaved mother. Her head was laid against the pillow, on which one arm was thrown in an abandonment of grief, while the other hung listlessly down. So absorbed was she in her newly-awakened sorrow, that Mr. Ravenshaw's entrance failed to arouse her, until, gently putting aside the four little children that clung weeping to their mother's skirts, he took her hand in his and addressed her in a very soft low voice, such a voice and such tones as showed

him to be one who had not been unused to exercise it in scenes of woe, and by the bed of sickness.

“Mrs. Brooks, guided by your little boy, I have ventured to seek you here, where my office only warrants my intruding. I am glad circumstances led me to your house to-day, to bring to you, as I have by God’s grace been able to do before, a message of peace and comfort from Him.”

“Oh, Mr. Ravenshaw ! Sir, is it you ? you’re as welcome to them as is in trouble as you are to them that’s glad of heart,” and she raised her head and wiped her eyes with her apron ; “ I’m a bit low this afternoon, for you see, sir, as I found this”—she opened the hand that had been thrown over the pillow, which she had kept clasped, and in it lay a small dry crust—“ I’m sure I’d tried, sir, all I could to leave off fretting after him as you told me, and I’d got to thinkin’ on him, as a little angel in heaven, and free from the pain that racked him here, when to-night, as I was settin’ the room a bit to rights, for I’ve

not had spirits to see to nothing lately—what should I find slipped down behind the bed but this little crust, which I give him to mumble just the night afore he died ; I thought mayhap 'twas his teeth a plaguing him, and 'twould ease his gums a bit, bless him—oh, dear, oh, dear, my baby ! my poor baby ! he's gone ! I'll never hear your sweet voice trying to call your ' daddy ' any more ! oh, deary me ! ”—and the poor woman rocked herself backwards and forwards in a paroxysm of grief, while the little ones, clustering at her knee, began to roar lustily at the sight of their mother's bitter sorrow.

“ Polly,” said Mr. Ravenshaw, addressing himself to the eldest and most tractable, “ go down stairs with Johnny and the others while I talk to your mother—there, go, like good children.” Yielding unwillingly and unresistingly to the calm authority of those tones, the children carried their sobs and murmurings on to the staircase, where their loud wailing, with an accompaniment of

tumbling and kicking upon the walls and boards, still testified to their filial sympathy.

"I know it's wrong to murmur so, sir, but it's the second I've lost," said the poor woman apologetically.

"Not lost—they are but gone before you," replied the Rector, solemnly; "their Father in heaven has called them because he loved them. Their Saviour has taken your little lambs into His bosom, before contact with the world had sullied their innocence and purity, for 'of such is the kingdom of God.' Do we grudge to give of the best we have to those we love on earth? Then is it not hard that we should yield anything unwillingly to that Saviour whom we profess to worship with all our heart and soul and mind and strength? to Him who hesitated not to drink the most bitter cup of human suffering to the dregs that we might have eternal life? To Him, who 'by the grace of God tasted death for every man?' Sorrow not, as those which have no hope, 'for if we believe that



Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.' ”

“Aye, sir, there's no book like the Bible to bring us round again when the heart's fit to break with heaviness, and there's no voice to me like yours to speak those blessed words of comfort—so gentle and solemn : would you be so very good, sir, as to read me that part of a chapter as you read to us after his little breath had gone from him ? I'm not much of a scholar, and though I looked hard for it afterwards, many times, I couldn't find it. I mind well in it the words, 'Can I bring him back again ? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.' ”

Mr. Ravenshaw took a small Bible from his pocket, and read in a very grave, impressive voice the twelfth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel. By the time he had concluded it, his attentive hearer had dried her tears, and her face was calm and resigned.

"Thank you very kindly, sir, my heart is lighter now by a deal—surely but I feel with King David, 'tis a sorer thing to see a child suffer than to lose it quickly.'"

Mr. Ravenshaw checked an involuntary smile at this simple way of receiving the scriptural history, but he let it pass unremarked; and as the good woman rose to lead the way down, he followed her, carefully stepping over the herd of little ones congregated upon the stairs, and gently patting their rough heads.

With the volatility of childhood their own tears had soon ceased when removed from the presence of that grief which had awakened their flow. When they reached the shop, Mr. Ravenshaw, partly with the view of diverting Mrs. Brooks's mind from turning again to its former channel, alluded to the object of his visit.

"I came here to-day for a pen-knife, Mrs. Brooks; I broke the blade of mine this morning—have you had a stock from N—— lately, good ones, such as you can recommend?"

“Yes sir, ’twas only yesterday John brought home a package of such things—would you be pleased to look at them?” and she unrolled a piece of washleather that she took from the recesses of a drawer, in which were scissors, knives, and other articles of cutlery.

Mr. Ravenshaw purposely entered into a dissertation on the respective merits of the different blades and of their makers, and postponed his final selection for some minutes, when he had the satisfaction of leaving his parishioner in a calm and settled frame of mind, very unlike that in which he had found her.

The Rector went from thence to the schools, where he noted the progress of the scholars beneath the careful eye and vigilant instruction of their mistress, Mrs. Bennett, a stiff, but not ultra-severe spinster, who prefixed the title of “Mistress” to her name, by virtue of her important position.

As Mr. Ravenshaw was returning from thence, his notice was attracted by a group of idlers out-

side the public-house. Two of them were quite strangers to the Rector ; the third, a great heavy, sullen-looking youth, the "black sheep" of the village, known by the name of "Blustering Bill," on account of his great strength, and the pride he took in relating his exploits. His occupation was at the blacksmith's forge, where his huge muscular frame and brawny arm were no slight recommendation to his employers. His two companions had the appearance of being navigators—probably engaged, or about to be, on a branch line from N—— northwards. They were all in earnest conference, and did not observe Mr. Ravenshaw's approach, until he had overheard the words,—

"At twelve to night, then. Mind, no fire-arms, or I'll be hanged if it's worth the risk." It was Blustering Bill who spoke.

"You'd be a d—d sneaking coward to call off now," answered one of the men addressed.

"Keep your blackguard tongue to yourself," retorted Bill, with a threatening movement of

his brawny arm, "or my fist 'll find its way down your cursed throat! I tell you I won't carry nothing as shall tempt me to shed a man's blood, let alone a woman's."

At this moment they perceived the Rector, and ceased speaking until he had passed on his way. Though Mr. Ravenshaw was quite unable to discover the clue to what he had overheard, he felt perfectly satisfied there was "mischief brewing," and determined to keep both eyes and ears open to discover, and, if possible, frustrate the conspirators. He walked musingly on, and had just reached old Thomas Powley's garden-gate, when a man came out from the cottage, whom he noticed at once as a stranger in Hazelwood.

He was dressed in a rough travelling coat and wore a smartish neckerchief, and a white hat, while he carried in one of his ungloved hands a travelling case. Mr. Ravenshaw lightly noted these particulars, and would, perhaps, have let him pass without close scrutiny, but that his

mind had been excited to suspicion by the conversation he had overheard at the public-house, and also that his eye was irresistibly attracted to (or we should rather say repelled in one sense by) the sinister expression of the pedlar's countenance, which was much increased by a most hideous squint. As he stood for a moment on the doorstep looking after the retreating stranger, old Thomas hobbled out to him.

"Well, sir, he be a queer customer, ben't he?" said old Powley, with a grin.

"What brought him here, Thomas?" asked the Rector.

"Why, you see, sir, he'd got a lot o' laces and gimcracks to sell, altho' he did look such a fine gentleman, but my old woman she don't wear such things, so he soon packed 'em together again and trudged."

"I almost wonder he should call at such a small cottage as your's, though these roses and honeysuckles tempt me in whenever I pass this way—did you have no talk with him, Thomas?"

"Lauk yes, sir, he told me as how he come down by rail from Lun'nun last night, and walked over from R—— this morning; he said he'd go on and rest at the public a bit—I told him where it was—and should make his way on foot to N—— to night."

The Rector stood thinking. "Do you know, Thomas," he said presently, "I don't like some things I've seen and heard this morning. There are several ruffianly-looking fellows about, whose faces I never saw in Hazelwood before, and whose coming bodes no good to the place. I think this man we've just seen is one of the gang. Did he ask you any questions, Thomas?"

"Well, now, I do mind me he said he was quite a stranger to this part of the country, and asked me if there warn't no great houses about, where he could try and sell some of his wares? so I said as how there was the Hall, and I telled him the road plain enough, but 'perhaps,' he says, 'there's gentlemen there only, and they won't buy these sort o' pretty things, or a lot o'

men servants, and I sha'n't get to see the maids.' 'Oh no,' says I, 'the missus is a young lady, and there's only two men sarvants, but lots o' lasses.' 'Ah!' says he, 'then I'll go and try—they doesn't keep dogs, does they?' 'Only one big mastiff,' says I, 'and he's chained in the back yard.' 'What's his name?' says he. 'Tiger,' says I, thinking this a rum question. 'Oh hoh!' says he. Well, then he hasn't done, but asks lots o' questions about the premises, and the bells, and the fastenings; when he sees me look 'mazed, he says, 'Ah, I dare say you wonders I ask these questions, but we travellers always does, because, you see, if we manages clever, and gets into a house, we gen'ally contrives to wheedle the gals into buyin' a bit o' lace for a smart collar, or a dainty piece of silk for an apern afore we goes out again.' He'd just said that, when he sees you come up to the gate, sir, and taking up his pack o' goods, makes off."

"I wish I had come sooner, Thomas, before



you had answered all his questions," answered the Rector, a shade of impatience and vexation perceptible in his usually amiable tone of voice. "You are too simple, Powley—born and nurtured in the innocence of Hazelwood, you are ignorant of the depth of wickedness that lies beyond it, and which these railroads will soon bring into every simple little village. I much mistake if, old man as you are, you will not live to see dastardly crime attempted in this quiet spot."

"God forbid, sir!—what is it you're afeard on?"

"I cannot tell you just now, Thomas. I may see you again to-day—I may come to you for advice and assistance. Now my time is precious, so I must wish you good morning;" and the Rector hastily left the cottage. Although by so doing he slightly swerved from the direct route to the Parsonage, he passed round to the public-house, and, as was rather unusual with him, he entered it.

Jerry Dawson leant against one of his own casks reading a time-worn newspaper—he looked up as the sound of a footstep fell on his ear, and seemed almost stupified when he beheld his unexpected visitor. Loud voices, and the rattling of spoons and glasses in the tap beyond, interrupted Mr. Ravenshaw's speech, who lowered his voice so that it could only be audible to the person addressed.

"I looked in, Dawson, to ask you to send another cask of that bitter ale I had for Master Herbert's drinking—he likes it very much, and it suits him very well indeed."

"Glad of it, sir—your orders shall be attended to. I've a cask come in yesterday. I'll send it round at once, if you please, sir," said the stout publican, rousing himself, and rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"No ; to-morrow will do—the barrel is not quite out yet. You've a noisy set in there, Dawson," said the Rector, inclining his head

in the direction whence the boisterous sounds proceeded.

“Aye, sir, they ain’t Hazelwood men—least-ways, three on ’em aint—two on ’em’s poor fellows lookin out for work on the railways or somewhere, and t’other’s a pedlar chap as stopped for a bit on his road to N——, sir ; so they’re all settin’ there together.”

“I’m sorry to hear William Clark’s voice among them.”

“Well, sir, ’tis a pity”—and the rough publican lowered his voice to a whisper—“and you’ll believe me, sir, as I never tempts him to drink, and it ain’t so much that, neither, as he gets such loose, idle ways. I always said there was no good in the chap from the time he was breeched.”

“Did the strangers seem to know each other at all?” asked Mr. Ravenshaw.

“What, the navvies and the travelling gent? oh, no, sir, but it’s fair time at N—— this week, and there’s always a few more strolling

fellows about then, but I don't know as ever I see such a lot together afore!"

"Dawson, my good fellow, step outside with me a minute," said the Rector in a whisper. "I don't wish to be overheard. I can trust you, can I not?" and he looked with a penetrating eye at the now perfectly bewildered Jerry.

"Oh, Lord, yes, sir, I hope so," stammered the publican, raising his round, honest eyes to meet the Rector's keen gaze.

"Then you must know, Dawson, I have reasons for thinking those men have some plot to rob the Hall this very night!" Here Mr. Ravenshaw lowered his voice to a whisper. "Now, I want you to keep an eye on them, and to watch them and their movements without their suspecting you of doing so—do you understand, Dawson?"

"Not quite." It required a little more explanation fully to prepare Jerry's simple mind to receive the enormity of such a scheme—which, however, was no sooner entertained than

he entered heart and soul into the Rector's design of frustrating the plot.

Mr. Ravenshaw looked worn and weary when he reached the parsonage. Charlie had been waiting dinner ; and during that meal observed that his friend scarcely ate a morsel, but kept swallowing glass after glass of cold water.

" You are ill, sir ?" said his pupil, anxiously.

" No, Charles, I am not ; but I have been rather worried this morning. I am sorry I can't tell you the cause."

" Oh, never mind, sir ; I do not wish you to tell me ; but I could not help noticing you were put out about something, and I so feared you did not feel well !"

As Mr. Ravenshaw rose to ring the bell, he laid his hand affectionately on the boy's head :—

" Thank you, Charles, for your sympathy. I can tell you it is something to a lonely man like I am, to have such a kind little friend watching and caring about him. I have some business which will take me over to N——

this afternoon. Will you like to go to the Hall, and spend it with your cousin?"

Charlie willingly assented.

"Mary," said the Rector, as his servant entered, "desire Robert to bring my horse round in half an hour."

## CHAPTER XV.

### PROMPT MEASURES.

“Then in light canter he outstript the wind,  
And left the dusty road soon far behind.”

Q. PHILIPPA'S GOLDEN BOOKE.

MR. RAVENSHAW was an excellent rider ; and, taking the back way from the Parsonage, crossing two fields, separated, the one by a ditch, and the other by a low hedge—both of which his thorough-bred mare took easily—he gained the high road, having thus considerably curtailed the distance: then, giving his steed a loose rein, he cantered steadily, yet with unflagging pace, along the piece of turf that skirted the road side. We will leave him on his way, to

return to the Hall, where, at the drawing-room table, Miss Vane is seated, with a brush in her hand, and a box of water-colours open beside her. Upon a leaf of the sketch-book before her is traced a slight outline of the Hall, which she is washing in with its first tints, while she talks to her cousin Charlie, who has arrived, and is ensconced on his usual couch. Receiving no answer to one or two casual observations she had made, she turned round, and saw Charles lying with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, apparently in deep thought, while his book lay open before him.

“A penny for your thoughts, Charlie!” cried his cousin, gaily; “or, stay,” she added, “that is setting too low an estimate on the brain-fancies of such a young philosopher as Charles Herbert—will sixpence buy me the knowledge, or must I bid still higher?”

“You shall receive the information gratis, Beatrice, on the score of relationship. I was thinking of Mr. Ravenshaw!” replied the boy.



"Of course you were—you worthy disciple of Thomas Carlyle, with your 'hero-worship.' I doubt if you ever think of any one else now, except the Rector!"

She laughed, but there was a secret mingling of jealousy with the tone in which she had spoken.

"I'm sure you are quite as often in my mind, Trissy, and as dear to me as ever—but I was just now wondering what could have ailed Mr. Ravenshaw this morning, although I've no business to wonder about it at all; as, if he had wished me to know, he would have told me at dinner-time what was the matter with him."

"Is Mr. Ravenshaw ill, Charlie?" asked Miss Vane, pausing for a moment, with her pencil to her lips.

"No, I don't think he is ill. He was all right this morning, and set me my task as usual, saying he was just going to call at Brooks's for a knife, and then look in at the schools, but he should be back by the time I

was prepared for him. However, the dinner-hour came, and still he did not come home. Just as I had begun to wonder what could have kept him so long, in he walked—but oh, so pale, Beatrice; and as he did not speak, but seemed thinking all the while we were at dinner, I did not like to disturb him. However, just as we had done—he had been taking scarcely anything himself, Trissy, but a piece of bread and drinking several tumblers of cold water—I asked him if he was ill, and he said ‘no, but something had made him anxious,’ and I was just now wondering what it could be when you spoke to me.”

“Perhaps something had gone amiss at the school with the children, or the churchwardens have been thwarting him?” suggested Miss Vane.

Charlie did not look satisfied with this solution.

“Oh, no, he tells me when things of that sort have happened; and, though they make

him look a little grave and harassed, they don't distress him so much as something had done to-day. He doesn't look so disturbed and pale about such trifles—and then, directly after dinner, he had Madge brought round, and rode off in such haste to N——.”

“Well, Charles, I see nothing in that. He often goes to N——,” replied Miss Vane. “It seems to me you're making mountains of mole-hills; and we shall have your hero walking quietly in, by-and-by, and putting all your sublime fears for him to flight.”

“I wish you wouldn't be so satirical, Beatrice,” replied Charles, angrily. “You know very well I don't want him to do otherwise. I wish I hadn't said anything about it to you!”

“Oh, the dear, cross little boy! he sha'n't be teased!” said his cousin, very tormentingly, as she went up to him, and tried to put her arms round him, but he pushed her away.

“Don't come near me, Trissy—for I don't love you at all just now—no! not half as well

as I do Mr. Ravenshaw! I'll go home to the Parsonage directly!—I declare I will! It's very cruel of you to put me in a passion!—Mr. Ravenshaw would be very angry!—If you touch me, I'll scream, and bring the whole house!"

Miss Vane prudently desisted.

"I own I was provoking, Charlie, dear; but do not let us quarrel when we might be passing this afternoon so cozily together. Your cushion is slipping down—so; now are you more comfortable?"

The gentle touch and soft words turned away the wrath; and, by a violent effort on the part of the passionate boy, the storm passed off, and they fell into conversation on different topics. Charlie had had a letter from Vane, at Harrow, full of boyish exploits—wondrous feats of ditch-leaping and racing; (not, alas! learning!) so they chatted of him, of Sydney's approaching departure for India—of Papa and Mamma—London—and Ashleigh Park, in B——shire, whither the Herberts had now retired after the prorogation

of Parliament—until it began to draw near Miss Vane's dinner-hour : and the increasing dulness of the sky gave warning of a cloudy evening.

\* \* \* \*

It was not quite six o'clock when Mr. Ravenshaw rode quietly through the village, and again stopped before old Powley's cottage gate. He rapped on the wooden palings with the handle of his riding-whip, to attract the attention of the inmates, as the door was closed—and presently old Sally, with her bare arms folded underneath her apron, and a shawl thrown over her head, hobbled forth.

“Do not come out into the cold air, Sally !” cried the Rector, in his loudest voice. “Only just tell your good man to come and speak to me here ; for I'm in a hurry.”

But the old woman was very deaf ; so persevered in her onward course until she reached the Rector's stirrup.

“Won't you be pleased to 'light, sir ?” she asked, peering up at him.

"Not to-day, Sally. I'm in haste to get home. Just tell Thomas I want him a moment."

"My goodness! but there be a power o' splashes on your Reverence's ridin' boots and on your coat. Where ha' yer been to get all this muck? and the poor beast, too—why, he's all in a lather!"

"I've been riding some distance, and very quickly, Sally. I went over some fields that were more muddy than I expected—nay, my good woman, don't soil your apron; it will all brush off when its dry," said the Rector, as the poor old soul was bent on removing some heavy splashes that had defied his 'antigropelos,' and invaded the unprotected portion of his knee.

"Ah, well, but ye mun just ha' a glass o' cider as ye sits there, then, if ye wun't come in;" and she was hobbling off.

"You may bring me a glass of that capital stuff, if you please, Sally—for I'm hot and tired, and tell Thomas to come to me." From com-

miseration for the infirmity of age, and a conviction of her utter incapacity to obey the command, the Rector forbore to add the injunction—"make haste," but he showed as many signs of impatience as his calm demeanour could exhibit, until Thomas emerged from the cottage door, walking pretty briskly, with the aid of his stick, towards him. The old man's eyes blinked so like an owl's in the daylight, that there was little doubt his afternoon nap had been broken into by the clergyman's summons.

"I'm afraid I disturbed you, Thomas, but now rub your eyes and wake up, there's a good man," said the Rector; "I told you I might want your help—you remember what passed between us this morning?"

• "That I do, sir; have you heard aught amiss, as you feared?"

"Yes, Thomas, I have good reason to suspect, indeed to feel sure, that there is a plot to—but here comes Sally with the cider. Thank you."

The Rector tossed off the contents of the

glass, and returned it to the old woman, with a kindly nod, who then hobbled off again.

“ Well, Thomas, this plot is none other than to break into Hazelwood Hall to-night, rob it, and commit heaven knows what other accessory crimes. My vocation is one of peace, but He who has elected me on this occasion as His agent in the discovery of this iniquitous design, will, I feel, direct me towards them on whose strong support I may depend, and will be the Protector of those who imperil their own safety on the side of right and justice. If you were a few years younger, Thomas,” said the Rector, stooping from his saddle and laying his hand on the old man’s shoulder, “ this arm would not lie idle I know, while those of others were raised in defence of one of the house of Vane.”

“ Nay, that it should not,” said the old man, his eyes flashing with the fire of youth kindled again at these words, “ and I’d fight now to my last gasp for one o’ that noble race—but I’m old and feeble, I can’t get agate as I used



to could," said the grey-headed cottager, sadly ;  
" and afore I could raise this arm to give a blow,  
it 'ud be struck down."

" It's not strength of limb I ask from you, Thomas ; though that I know you'd spend in this cause to your last breath, my good old friend, were it demanded of you—but I merely wish you to tell me the names of one or two strong young fellows, whom I could trust as not being connected with this gang of thieves, and upon whose aid I might depend to-night."

" Aye, Sir, that I can—why, there's my nephew, George Marsh—my own sister's child ; he married 'tother day a tidy lass from yon village, Kirford, where he's now in work at a farmer's, and is as steady a young chap as you'd wish to clap eyes on—and strong built, too—he's over here to-day ; I'll send him down to your reverence, and you can keep him to-night, if you think fit."

" What will his wife say ?" asked the Rector, with a sly smile.

“Why, bless your honour, George aint the man to stick to his wife’s petticoat—though he be but just married—and Lucy’s a good faithful lass, as can trust her husband, if he do keep away from her a whole day and night.”

“Then send him to the parsonage, Thomas, after dark this evening, and you may tell him what I want him for, that he may let his wife know he will not return to Kirford to night, but keep silence on the matter to every one else. There’s no occasion to mention it to Sally, she’d only fidget herself about George, perhaps.”

“You are right, sir; I won’t say a word about it to the old woman—then there’s Newton’s grandson, Harry, him as is learning the cobblering trade with his grandfather—he’s but a stripling to be sure, but hearty, and they’re the right sort, honest and true to the back-bone, are them Newtons!”

“That’ll do, Thomas; I pass old Newton’s on my road home, so I’ll call and speak to the lad—and now, Powley, one more thing you

must do for me ; I know you often get as far as Dawson's for your jug of beer at meals, just go round there presently, see him by himself, and tell him to come down to the Parsonage about nine o'clock, as I wish to speak with him."

"Aye, that I will, sir," said the old man, briskly, quite proud to be employed—"Good day to you, sir," he added as the Rector trotted quickly off; "and God bless and defend you and Hazelwood Hall from harm this night!"

Mr. Ravenshaw next curbed in his steed before the cobbler's small workshed. Old Peter was not in, but a tall, well-made youth came out at the door.

"I wish you'd call and measure me for a pair of boots this evening, Newton; I can't stop now, but I want them directly, so don't fail me, and come yourself, to the Parsonage, between eight and nine."

"I'll be there, Sir—would you want good

stout leather? we're out of stock o' the thinner sort just now, but—"

"We'll talk about that when you take my measure;" and the Rector galloped off again, and this time he did not stop until he dismounted at his own door, consigning his horse to the care of the sturdy Robert—a country lad, but not of the parish of Hazelwood.

Mr. Ravenshaw turned round before entering the house, and said, as the boy was leading the tired and heated animal to the stable, "Come into the kitchen for orders at nine o'clock to-night, Robert." The lad pulled his forelock respectfully, and did not even wonder "where master was going off to so early the next morning, as to order his horse over-night."

\* \* \* \* \*

When, between seven and eight o'clock, Mr. Ravenshaw, with perfect composure in his appearance and manner, walked into the drawing-

room at Hazelwood Hall, Beatrice could not resist stooping down and whispering into Charlie's ear, "The mountain *has* brought forth a mouse after all!" while a mischievous smile, which lighted up her whole face with unusual archness, lurked about the corners of her mouth, and played in her eyes, as she extended her hand to the Rector.

Mr. Ravenshaw was not insensible to the beauty of this passing expression, and as he held those delicate fingers between his own, he felt, with all the exultation of manhood, that it would be his pride, his glory, to imperil even his life, for one so irresistibly attractive—but, this momentary throb of chivalrous admiration quelled, a shadowy vision of the past, now transformed into an angel of light, rose to rebuke him, and his heart at once shut out the image of the beautiful woman that had power to stir its long silent pulses with passionate emotion. Yet, in their tranquillity, he sincerely wished Beatrice Vane had been endowed with less per-

sonal attractions, or that she had never crossed his path. After returning his hostess's greeting, he accosted Charlie, and told him the chair was in waiting to convey him home.

"But are you leaving again, directly, sir? why, you've only just come," replied the boy.

"No; I am going to remain and speak with your cousin about a matter of business. You have dined, Miss Vane?"

"Yes; and Charlie has had a cup of coffee with me since."

"Then wish your cousin good-evening, Charles, and I will carry you out to the chair—it looks very cloudy, and I wish you to get home before the rain."

The boy complied, though not very willingly, but he never attempted to dispute the Rector's authority by word or look.

Mr. Ravenshaw himself carried his pupil to the chair, placed him comfortably in it, protected him by woollen wrappings from the threatening shower, and saw him drawn

away : then he returned to the drawing-room. Miss Vane did not perceive his entrance—she had been earnestly watching the tender care with which he had been providing for the ease and personal safety of his little charge, and as she observed him, her eyes filled with tears, forced from her by a kind of envy—a desire to be the object of such solicitude. It was a strange feeling, such as *she* had never known before. When she turned round and saw the Rector standing behind her, her cheeks glowed, as though he had arrived at an unwelcome moment ; and so it was, for that moment was unwelcome to Beatrice Vane, when she was surprised, having cast aside for an instant her veil of chill reserve, to indulge her naturally ardent, yet feminine impulses.

But Mr. Ravenshaw heeded not the emotion he had disturbed ; had he noted it, he was too free from masculine vanity to have attributed its origin to himself ; and he was now revolving in his own mind how he should break

to Miss Vane his knowledge of the premeditated attack upon her house. He presently opened the subject: speaking in his usually clear, concise manner, he told her all that had excited his suspicions, (with which the reader has been made acquainted in the last chapter), and finally, with his own determination, personally, to defend her, and the means he had taken to protect her and her property. Beatrice Vane, though too passionate and impulsive to merit the appellation of being "strong-minded," was not subject to hysterics nor fainting, she therefore resorted to neither of these expedients, but heard him patiently to the end. When he had concluded, her cheek was very pale, and her eye had something like fear in its expression, as she asked, helplessly—

"What must I do, Mr. Ravenshaw?"

"Nothing, Miss Vane; but trust yourself implicitly to me," replied the Rector with a smile.

"I do so, fully," she answered in a low, soft



voice, and made a movement towards him, as though to be close to his side was a refuge. He could not resist taking her hand in his, and it was not instantly withdrawn.

“Miss Vane,” he asked presently, “have you confidence in your servants? can you trust them all?”

“No!” she replied. “Stephen leaves me in a week’s time, I neither like the man, nor do I believe he bears me any good will; although not positively disrespectful, he has been very sullen ever since I gave him notice to quit my service, and I understand from Mrs. Gould he adds drunkenness to his other vices—I shall not feel quite easy in my mind until he is out of the house.”

“We must secure him first on suspicion, or, if he sees me here and detects our counter-plans, he will find some means to put his accomplices on their guard, should he be connected with the gang, as is most probable,” said the Rector.

"But how shall you manage it, Mr. Ravenshaw?" asked Beatrice, anxiously.

"You said you would trust to me," was the smiling yet evasive reply.

"Did I understand you that you had sent to London for some of the police?"

"Oh, yes, I expect two of the detective body from London to-night, and some of the police force from N——; they will come over, as I left directions, in a close fly, to the fields, behind the Parsonage, and walk across, so as to excite no suspicion."

"Thanks cannot repay you all the trouble you have taken and all you will yet undergo for me," replied Beatrice, and her voice trembled.

Mr. Ravenshaw's eyes were fixed upon her. Again, that intoxication of the senses stole over him. Again the same vision arose; but this time it paled and receded before the embodiment of female beauty on which his eyes rested. Still, he met and did battle with the enemy of his peace, and overthrew him. Calmly he answered—

"I hope I should do the same for any woman alone and defenceless as you are ; but I must now leave you for an hour or so, Miss Vane."

"You will return as soon as possible?" she pleaded, persuasively.

"Undoubtedly ; I would not quit you at all this evening, but that you are quite safe for the present, and I have to collect my little force," he said with a smile. "We shall come and take up our abode beneath your roof to-night ; so never fear, but that, with God's blessing, all will yet go well."

He left her ; and as the shadows of evening fell around, a shadow and a dreariness fell on Beatrice's heart. She had felt how sweet it was to be protected by a man's strong voice and arm at a time when a woman's pride and beauty would be powerless to shield her from danger. Her spirit of haughty self-dependence once crushed, it could never again rear its head, and she bowed her face on her hands and wept, not at the coming danger—no, she was strong

in *his* strength, but that, alone and unprotected, she might have to meet other trials in the journey of life, when the same brave arm and deep, soothing tones might not be near to aid and encourage her ; for Beatrice lived in the present alone, since into his heart she *could* not look, and into her own she *dare* not.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## FURTHER PRECAUTIONS.

"How circumstance brings noble natures out !  
Had trial ne'er come, the world had never known  
This lady's quality."

GOLDEN BOOKE.

"CHARLIE, my boy, will you object to going to bed rather earlier than usual to-night, to oblige me? I want to go out, and should like to see you snugly in your nest first," said the Rector, soon after he returned from his visit to the Hall. Charlie did object very much ; he could not take sufficient exercise in the day-time, poor little fellow, to be ready for his bed at night, hence arose a very strong repugnance within

him to comply with the Rector's request, which, however, he did not express ; so Mr. Ravenshaw again triumphed, and carried his little pupil upstairs forthwith into the room adjoining his own, where Charlie slept. Mr. Ravenshaw himself attended to the boy night and morning, and he now said, as he tucked him up in his little bed,—

“Charles, I may not be able to return here to-night ; I most probably shall not do so before morning. Mary will sleep in my room, and I will leave the door just ajar between you.”

“Is some one dying, sir ?” asked the boy. (Mr. Ravenshaw had once before been absent all night with a sick parishioner.)

“No, nor ill, that I know of ; everything that has surprised you to-day will be explained to-morrow. Have patience, my boy, and daylight will elucidate the mystery. Now, have you all you want ? Then go to sleep—good night.”

As Mr. Ravenshaw was descending the stairs

he was met by his trusty and privileged servant.

"I was just a comin' after you, sir; here's Jerry Dawson in the kitchen a sayin' as you sent for him, and Henry Newton a wantin' to measure you for a pair o' boots."

"The boots may wait," observed Mr. Ravenshaw, *sotto voce*. "Tell Dawson and Newton to sit down in the kitchen; I'll come to them presently. Give them some beer, Mary."

Mr. Ravenshaw went into his study, and leaning his head on the mantel-piece, was thinking intently, when Mary again appeared.

"Why, bless my heart, master, here's George Marsh, Master Powley's nephew, a sayin' as you wished to speak with him about summat. I wonder how many more on 'em's to come! We shall ha' the kitchen full o' men folk soon. I supposed I was to give him some beer too?"

"Quite right, Mary; I'll go to them at once. Will you remain and close these shutters?" Mr. Ravenshaw said this with the view of preceding her to the kitchen, and attained his end, quietly

slipping the bolt behind him as he entered. "Now, my good men," he began, addressing his auditors, who stood humbly caps in hand awaiting his commands, "I have sent for you hither to aid me in a just and good cause. Henry Newton, the boots must wait till another day; I have other business for you than heel-ing and soling just now. You look as if you would make a good soldier; can you raise that young strong arm of yours, if necessary, to defend the laws of your country—to protect one weaker than yourself?—a woman!"

"Aye, that I can and will, sir," replied the youth, with sparkling eyes; "let me see the chap as 'ud take the wind out o' me afore I'd left a mark or two on him," and he clenched his broad fist. "I'm your man, sir—what is it you want of me?"

"Your word, that you will stand by me and defend a noble lady and a noble house from lawless ruffians. Your hand, in token of your truth and honour." It was instantly given.



The Rector then turned to the other man. —“Marsh, *your* character as an honest, true man is too well known to be doubted; I feel certain that you are a brave one, and to you I give the option of refusing me your aid. I have since thought I should not have accepted it—you have a young wife—remember her—ought you, for her sake, to run *any* risk? I shall think none the worse of you that you desert me now, and you have full liberty to leave this house; I am confident that your lips will never frustrate our plans by an indiscreet word.”

“If so be as our lady’s noble Hall is in danger, as I misdoubt by all I’ve heard it is, sir, that fine old place as I’ve played about when a little lad, I’ll be hanged if George Marsh won’t strike pretty hard for it!” and the athlete let his clenched fist fall on the table, till it made every dish and glass on the kitchen dresser ring again.

“Thanks, thanks, good friends! Dawson,

you know what has brought you together hither. I leave you free to choose ; you have a wife and child depending on you too—go or stay.”

“ I stick by you, sir,” said the publican, stoutly. “ My wife sha’n’t call a coward her husband, and I’m thinking she wouldn’t wish.”

“ So say I,” cried George.

“ Have you sent to tell your wife not to expect you home to-night, Marsh ?” asked the Rector.

“ Yes, sir ; I walked to Kirford and back myself this afternoon.”

“ Marsh and Dawson, *you* know what it is we fear this night. Newton, there is a plot to break into and rob Hazelwood Hall at midnight. You and Marsh meet me there at ten o’clock : come as quietly as possible, so as not to excite suspicion. Dawson, follow them at half-past. I expect some police officers here by-and-bye. Hark ! I thought I heard a low ring at the gate bell. Are those scamps at your place yet, Dawson ?”

"One o' the navvies is, but he's half drunk; the pedlar chap went off towards N—— this evening.—I doubt if he's clain gone, though," added Jerry.

"And the other?" interrogated the Rector.

"I missed him somehow; and t'other fellow was either so drunk or stupid, I couldn't make out from him where his chum had gone off to."

"We now part for an hour, my men; your hands. I depend on you to be punctual."

"Ay, that we will! Never fear us!" was the ready reply, as the rough, honest fists were thrust into their clergyman's grasp.

As the Rector was closing the back door behind them, he distinctly heard the withdrawal of bolts and bars, followed up by a little scream from Mary. Directly she saw her master she rushed up to him.

"Oh, for the love of pity, sir, what is it?—Here's more men, and strangers, too, a sayin' as they *must* see you, and you wants 'em.

When I tell'd 'em to go about their business, I'm sure I——”

“My good woman, you'll drive me distracted with that tongue of yours. Why can I not invite my friends to see me without causing you all this distress? Now go and attend to the only part that concerns you—send some cold meat and ale into the dining room directly.”

But the now hysterical female was not to be appeased.

“I don't care—friends, or no friends, master, there's something wrong, and you not comin' home to-night at all,” she sobbed; “all I know is, I ain't a goin' to sleep here all alone in the house, with only——”

What the remainder of her speech would have been never transpired, for Mr. Ravenshaw put her aside, and accompanied the police (for it was they who had arrived, as the reader may have already guessed,) into the dining-room, shutting the door behind him. While they were partaking of the refreshment which Mary

had brought in with a flustered air and heaving bosom, in compliance with her master's wishes, the Rector left them and sought his disturbed domestic in the kitchen. He found her quietly tying her bonnet.

"Mary, what are you doing?" said the Rector, sternly. She started at his voice. "Where are you going?"

"I tell'd you afore, I ain't a goin' to stay here all by myself with them strange men, and I don't know what all about," she grumbled.

"Leave this house to-night, Mary, and you never enter it again!" said the Rector firmly; "and on only one condition do you remain in my service, that is, that you go quietly to bed now, and let me hear no more of this nonsense!"

"Oh, master, oh, Mr. Ravenshaw," expostulated the aggrieved domestic.

"Choose, choose quickly, I have no time to waste in words: do you remain with me, or look

out for another and a kinder master?" said the Rector.

"I won't leave you, sir, I'll do as you wish; I'm sure I've no complaints to make, tho' to be sure it seems hard upon a poor girl, (Mary was certainly on the wrong side of forty!) as is timorsome by nature, for I always was, sir, to say as she *must* and she *mustn't*, and—" Here Mr. Ravenshaw thrust a chamber candle into her hand, and cut off all further incoherent remonstrance; but said kindly, as he followed her up the stairs—

"You've nothing to fear, Mary: go and forget all in sleep, and that I've been a hard master for once; trust me that I should not leave you and Master Herbert alone here if there were the slightest cause for alarm."

Mary appeared rather re-assured by the time she reached her chamber; and Mr. Ravenshaw, feeling that he might now depend upon her tranquillity, descended the stairs again. In the passage he met Robert.

"Sorry to be rather later than you told me in coming in, sir," he said; "but your horse cast a shoe this afternoon—I found it out while I was a washin' of 'im—did he go lame at all, sir?"

"No, I did not observe he did; it must have happened coming home."

"Werry like it was, sir, so I took'd him down to the forge, and Bill warn't in, so I waited a bit for him, as I alays likes the horse shod by him, 'cos I thinks he's a knowin' hand!"

"Did he come at last?" interrupted the Rector.

"Yes! he came in, and then it wor' done in two minutes."

"And did Bill—no, never mind," said the Rector stopping short. "Robert, have you done all your out-of-door work?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then now attend to my instructions; first, can you get yourself some supper, for Mary's gone to bed?"

“ Oh yes, sir.”

“ Well, when you have had it, follow me down to the Hall, lock up the house, and let yourself drop out of the window on the landing : if you meet anyone by the way, say you’re in a hurry, and do not stop to talk to them—you understand ?”

“ Yes, sir,” replied the stolid and imperturbable Robert, whose heavy, unimpressible, but not unamiable countenance showed not the slightest degree of wonderment or perplexity at these unusual directions : he was there to obey his master’s orders, and nothing would have induced him to swerve one iota from their strict letter.

\* \* \* \*

It was a murky night, a drizzling rain was falling, and, most fortunately for the secrecy of their schemes, Mr. Ravenshaw and his official companions made their way to the Hall, under the cover of umbrellas.



"Who's a comin' now at this time o' night I wonder!" growled Stephen, as, hearing a ring at the front door bell, he reluctantly bent his steps thither, while there was a visible disquiet in the tones of his voice. There was a perceptible tremor in his manner when he admitted the Rector and several strangers.

"Is your mistress in the drawing-room, Stephen?" asked Mr. Ravenshaw.

"I—I think she's gone to bed with the headache," stammered the man, still holding the door open for the unwelcome visitors to depart.

"You may close the door, Stephen; these gentlemen and myself have business to transact here, with your mistress's sanction, which will probably detain us some hours," said the Rector quietly.

The man did as he was desired; but as he cast a furtive glance at the strangers, his cheeks became deadly pale; he began, as the saying is, (forgive us, reader, if we use a vulgar expression, the only apposite one that presents itself), to

"smell a rat." One of their faces was not unfamiliar to him. He dared not refuse to close the door, and directly he had done so a hand was laid on his shoulder, and as it twisted him round, a pair of sharp keen eyes twinkled into his.

"What, youngster, you hav'n't had enough of the 'mill' yet? or perhaps you want a little change of air this time?—suppose you try Norfolk Island?"—said the voice from the face that confronted him: at the same moment he was arrested by both arms, and a desperate struggle ensued, during which a pair of handcuffs found their way over Stephen's wrists.

"Wot are yer' all a settin' on to me fur?" said the man in an injured voice; "I ain't done nothin' as I knows on!"

"That remains to be seen," said the Rector; "the best thing you can do now, Stephen, is to allow yourself, without resistance, to be taken into custody. The events of this night will prove your guilt or your innocence; if you are convicted of the former,

struggles now will not avail you, but rather prejudice your cause hereafter ; while, if innocent, submit to imprisonment for one night, and you have nothing further to fear, no one will suffer you to be unjustly condemned !” but it was amidst a torrent of oaths, after a sharp contest, that Stephen was stoutly dragged up the back staircase and incarcerated in a small store-room quite at the top of the old Hall, where a little wired window was the only outlet, and the door could be fastened with a sharp bolt on the outside.

The policeman, however, remained in the passage while Mr. Ravenshaw went down stairs ; as he reached the drawing-room, Miss Vane came out ; she had heard the scuffle of feet and the noise of voices, but apprehensive of she knew not what, she had not until now ventured to enquire the cause.

“ I was coming to see if you were alarmed, Miss Vane,” said the Rector, taking her hand and leading her back again into the room ; “ and

to tell you that half the battle is won, for I suspect the ringleader or chief accomplice is in safe custody."

"What! Stephen?" exclaimed Miss Vane.

"Yes, one of the detective officers tells me he had a month at the treadmill when a mere lad for some petty larceny. How did he contrive to get into your service?"

"Oh, I engaged him to oblige poor Waklyn; he was the son of some friends of his; he took a fancy to the young man, and I dare say never knew of his former delinquency. Waklyn is the kindest-hearted old creature breathing, and would not think or believe harm of any one!"

"Was it not rather indiscreet," replied the Rector, "to take one servant without a character, at another's recommendation?"

Miss Vane did not look offended at this implied censure, as might have been anticipated; she merely replied, "It was just after papa's death, and I was glad to be spared the trouble of enquiring into the matter."

“ And for this want of caution you have well nigh paid dearly !” retorted Mr. Ravenshaw, and rather abruptly he left the room.

In the kitchen he found the servants clustered in a body ; they were all talking in a low voice, and had evidently become aware there was something unusual going on in the house. His own lad, Robert, was now among them, but apparently not enlightening them on the mysterious course of events, although Mr. Ravenshaw entered in time to hear them overpowering the stupified boy with interrogations. “ What did the Parson say to you ?” “ Why did he tell you to come here ?” “ Do you know if Stephen’s been at any mischief ?”

They started as the Rector’s voice addressed them : “ Are you all here ?”

They looked round, and a little dirty scullery maid was dragged out of a back kitchen, where, by the dreary light of a tallow candle, she was eating her solitary supper upon an inverted beer barrel, being considered of a lower grade than

the rest of the domestics, and consequently excluded from sitting down at meals with them. When their outward trepidation at the Rector's sudden and unwonted invasion into their domain had subsided into composure, he quietly and clearly explained to them the nature of the danger that threatened, and the arrest of their fellow servant on suspicion; he concluded by saying—

“Your mistress has invested me with full authority to act for her in this emergency. Are you all willing to receive my commands as though uttered by her?”

Assent being willingly given, the Rector continued—

“The women-servants will oblige me by being in their rooms at eleven o'clock, having all their lights extinguished, and not quitting them again to-night on any pretence whatever—let them feel satisfied they are perfectly safe there. You men will remain to assist me in guarding the house; I expect three strong fellows here pre-

sently, Dawson, Marsh, and Newton, and there are two police officers and four of the active body upstairs ; close the shutters and doors at the usual hour, as though the household was gone to rest, and all remain quietly here until you have further directions ; obey implicitly my orders and those of the officers, and all will yet go well, I hope and pray. Robert, your post is to guard the prisoner upstairs ; place your chair against the door, and remain there to-night—go directly, and then the police can come down : say that I wish to speak to them in the library, and will meet them in the Hall.”

\* \* \* \*

When Mr. Ravenshaw returned to the drawing-room some time afterwards, he found it empty ; but yet the presence that had so recently filled it spoke to him in everything around, and awoke a restless desire and a sense of disappointment in the Rector's breast, that Miss Vane would not share the vigil with him—he

had hoped, at least, for that repayment of his services. But the little French clock on the mantel-piece ticked steadily on. The quarter chimed, and away went old Time with his scythe again. The Rector sat grimly and drearily watching the mechanism, until eleven o'clock struck, when the rustling of a silk dress fell on his ears. He rose instantly—Miss Vane was in the room—

“Oh, Mr. Ravenshaw, I did not know you were here ; I met Robert some time ago, who told me you were in the library with the police ; I hope you have not been long alone !”

“I thought you might have gone to rest,” he said with an arch smile.

She flushed up and looked hurt—“You *did* not,” she answered quickly—“you did not suppose such a thing for an instant, Mr. Ravenshaw. I am neither cowardly nor ungrateful.”

“No: of that I feel assured,” he kindly replied ; “but now I am going to exact a promise from you ; you see I am very mean in



making my terms for serving you beforehand."

A furtive, startled expression stole across her face. As she met his gaze and the undisguised admiration betrayed in it, she moved hastily away. She had been standing close beside him. He noted the action, and defined the cause; in an instant the proud blood mounted to his temples—he had been misunderstood—a chillness and restraint sprang up between them.

"I am afraid I expressed myself unfortunately, Miss Vane; I simply meant to ask you not to expose yourself to any danger, whatever you may hear to-night. If you will remain in this room, I will return to you as soon as the affray is over, and tell you all."

"You may depend on me," she answered laughing; "I am not brave enough to come and fight, nor silly enough to harass you with my feminine presence and helplessness."

Mr. Ravenshaw was struck by the power and

force in Miss Vane's whole bearing, as the light illumined her tall figure from the chandelier above their head—yet womanhood cast its shade of softness over the outline of her form and features, and betrayed itself in the silvery, tremulous tone of her voice. Perhaps a sense of his own weakness filled the Rector with a feeling of irritation, and made him again allude to what had been better passed over.

“I am sorry you misunderstood me just now, Miss Vane; believe me, I am never likely to ask more from you than your friendship.”

At first her cheek crimsoned, and she felt stung as by an insult; the next instant her heart sank—her proud spirit was crushed. If his words *were* galling, had she not brought them upon herself? But she quickly regained her composure, and replied to him bravely—

“So you thought my vanity required a death-blow, Mr. Ravenshaw?—I confess it was merited, yet, believe me, I never seriously expected to be

more highly honoured than by your friendship."

The tables were turned.

Oh, Ernest Ravenshaw; where was now that angel visitant from the grave?—that idol of your early manhood, so faithfully and fondly cherished by your memory through nearly twenty years of trial and temptation?—Fled for ever from that moment, yet not with a frown—she leaves you with a smile to her rival.

A sound of footsteps in the Hall, and subdued voices, recalled Mr. Ravenshaw to a remembrance that he was there to act the part of *defender*, and not *lover*, to the noble lady before him.

"Say, God speed you, Miss Vane, for I have a superstitious reverence about carrying good wishes in every undertaking," he said, moving towards the door.

No answer came—Beatrice was standing with her back towards him—he went up to her, she was trembling violently.

"I cannot leave you so, Miss Vane; but, indeed, no harm shall come to you!"

"Do you think it is for myself I fear?" she replied with impatient scorn; "but hark, they are coming for you—go—go—and God be with you!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE BURGLARS.

"And sleep must lie down arm'd, for the villainous  
centre bits  
Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of the moonless  
nights."

TENNYSON.

"Just then his languid eyes he opened,  
And instantly their pupils did dilate  
With heavenly joy; he sought to raise his head,  
But, falling back again in blissful state,  
Gazed on her earnestly; his pleasure great,  
Left him no consciousness of pain at all,  
Nor care for what might presently befall,  
She looked so tranquil, and sedately staid."

GOLDEN BOOKS.

THE clock chimed the hour of midnight, and a  
peaceful stillness reigned over the village of  
Hazelwood. The old Hall stood looking most

profoundly solemn, as the moon, hitherto obscured by clouds, emerged suddenly from behind her sable pall, and shed her pale lustre over the ancient mansion. Her beams fell on some dark objects noiselessly advancing over an adjacent field in the direction of the Hall. They became invisible as they approached it; but the crackling of brushwood and branches indicated that they were effecting a private and illegal entrance for themselves into the grounds by a wild shrubbery that skirted one side. Presently, the low growl of a chained mastiff gave warning of their vicinity. The words "So ho! Tiger, lie down!" and a large piece of poisoned meat dexterously thrown within his kennel instantaneously quieted the noble animal for ever. Silently, the burglars, with list-clad feet, crossed the paved yard, and all appeared to promise prosperously for their nefarious schemes. Their low whistle was echoed from within, and at the same time the door of the back kitchen was softly unbolted from the inside, and noiselessly opened.

"Why the devil hav'n't you got a light?—a lantern or somethin'!" grumbled the first man who entered.

"Hush!" was the only reply as the others groped their way in.

They had no sooner all crossed the threshold than they became sensible of the trick that had been played them, and that they were the victims of a scheme more subtle than their own. The door was instantly closed behind them and barricaded; a light was struck, and they found themselves grappled with, man to man, until some good strong cord, and a few pair of handcuffs, rendered the most desperate ruffians powerless, and the rest an easy prey.

\* \* \* \*

Beatrice Vane paced up and down the drawing-room: her heart beating violently, dreading each sound, yet straining every nerve to catch the faintest clamour or outcry. The hour of midnight had but just sounded by the Hall.

clock, when she thought she distinguished some distant noises, and presently the sharp report of a pistol seemed to make every pulse within her stand still with terror—bloodshed she had not for a moment anticipated—she rushed towards the door and opened it, then suddenly remembering Mr. Ravenshaw's wishes, she remained motionless ; besides, what aid could she render to them ? a woman ? she wrung her hands in desperation as she acknowledged her utter helplessness.

Be patient, Beatrice, you are not weak ! you are not powerless ! your services will soon be required. Work is already set out for those fair fingers more befitting them than the use of weapons of strife and warfare. The hour is not far distant—is even now here—nerve your woman's heart and woman's hand to the utmost, for aid will soon be demanded of them.

The door opened, and Mr. Ravenshaw entered ; his cheeks were very white, and he spoke quickly and with difficulty ; but this Beatrice attributed to excitement.



“The danger is passed, Miss Vane, God be praised!” he exclaimed; “we have them in safe custody; they will be all lodged in N—— Gaol to-night!”

“I am very thankful, above all, to you,” said Beatrice with a sigh of relief.

“But a small share of gratitude is due to me, Miss Vane—a very large portion to Him who strengthened my arm, and made me the instrument of averting this danger from you and your house,” replied the Rector solemnly—he supported himself as he spoke against the arm of the sofa on which she had seated herself.

“How many were there of them?” she asked, without raising her eyes to his.

“Only six,” he answered in a voice so low and faint that she started, and looked up; his face was ashy white, and the colour had forsaken even his lips.

“Good heavens, Mr. Ravenshaw! What is the matter?” she cried, springing to his side;

“you are ill ! hurt, perhaps ? how careless I have been !”

He tried to speak, but before he could utter a word, he fell heavily forward ; it would have been to the ground, had not Beatrice’s slight, yet resolute arms sustained him, and placed him upon the sofa. She then opened a small cheffonier, and taking from it a decanter of wine, poured some into a little china cup, and put it to his lips—he had not quite lost consciousness, his eyelids quivered, and he swallowed it, though with difficulty.

As she stood watching beside him, she glanced down for an instant, from the pale face before her, and saw on her dress some stains of blood—he had then been wounded ! she shrunk back appalled, and saw that a crimson stream trickled slowly from his coat sleeve, over the back of his hand ; that there was blood upon the floor and upon her dress. She sprang to the bell-rope, and pulled it until old Waklyn came in trembling and breathless—with a

knowledge of the recent affray, (for he was too old and feeble to have taken an active part in it), and his present hasty summons.

“ Mr. Ravenshaw has been very much hurt, Waklyn—bid Gregory take one of the horses, and gallop instantly to N—— for Mr. Edwards !” was the peremptory order.

“ Well, he do look mortal bad to be sure,” said the old man, glancing commiseratingly at the Rector’s recumbent figure.

“ Do you hear me ? don’t stand there—go—send directly ; any delay may be fatal ;” and Beatrice accompanied her words by an energetic stamp of her little foot, so well understood by the old servant, who toddled off at a most perilous rate, for his feeble step and aged neck, down stairs to rout up the stiff and weary Gregory, who having really taken a most active part in the late contest, had just retired to the loft, to enjoy his hardly-earned repose. However, when he heard of the mission on which he was to be despatched, and

for whom medical aid was required, his zeal was directly aroused, and all bruises and fatigue forgotten.

The Rector's worth was known and acknowledged by both high and low ; there was not one who knew him, but felt his life was most valuable, most precious—a life to be preserved for its own sake, and that of hundreds of his fellow-creatures.

“ Ah ! I thought as how that pistol-shot struck somewheres, as that ill-looking chap, with the squint in his eye, fired ; for altho' I was a strugglin' hard with Blustering Bill at the time, I heerd a groan just ahind me,” said Gregory to his fellow-servant, as he was, to use his own phrase, “ slippin' on a few things.”

“ Please God, he don't bleed to death afore you comes back with the doctor ?” said old Waklyn.

“ The Lord forbid ; just reach us that lantern off the nail there. Well, now I'm off ; Lord !

how my bones do ache!" groaned the weary coachman.

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Vane's next proceeding was to take a bottle of *eau-de-cologne* from the mantel-piece, and bathe the forehead of the almost lifeless man, while she substituted the stronger essence of brandy for her former remedy; these stimulants somewhat revived him, he opened his eyes, and tried to speak, but the effort was too great for him.

"Do you think you could raise yourself a little with my assistance?" asked Miss Vane, "it is of the greatest consequence this hemorrhage should be stopped; I must take your coat off, and bind up the arm tightly." He endeavoured to answer this appeal by moving slightly, but when she tried to remove his coat, he writhed with pain.

The colour forsook Beatrice's cheek, but

seizing a pair of scissors from her work-basket, she cut up the sleeve as far as the shoulder that contained the wounded member, and then it readily slipped off the other. The arm of his shirt was saturated in blood, and Miss Vane detected the spot whence it flowed. She would not trust herself to examine the wound, but bound her cambric handkerchief tightly round the place, adding his own over that—bravely she persevered, although her cheek blanched at the moans elicited by pressure on the wound, and her whole frame was sick and faint at the sight before her.

Still Beatrice shrank not from her self-imposed task, nor deputed, as she might so well have done to a servant, or the matronly Mrs. Gould, her post of nurse and watcher over the wounded man. Wounded, God only knew how severely, perhaps fatally, for her! And should she, for whom he had undergone so much—should she shrink from his side now? No! though wearily and anxiously the time

passed, she would not leave him for one moment, or relax her tender care.

He had lain very still for an hour, asleep from exhaustion, but Miss Vane observed, as a favourable symptom, that the flow of blood had ceased, (for the outer hand was unstained), and that his breathing was quiet and regular. She had thrown a warm shawl over him and retired to an ottoman at some distance from the sofa, where she sat very still, with a book in her hand, from which she did not read a single line; her eyes kept wandering to the sofa, and she stole every now and then softly up to it, to look at her unconscious charge.

In one of these visits of observation, as she was bending over him, he suddenly opened his eyes :

“Where am I? Beatrice! am I dreaming?” and he passed his hand across his forehead—  
“Oh, I remember all perfectly now!” he added, with returning consciousness.

“Hush! you must lie quite still, and not

“speak until the doctor has been to dress your arm,” said Miss Vane, composedly, averting her eyes from his, that were now fixed so earnestly on her face.

Suddenly an exclamation of pain escaped him ; Beatrice could not relieve it, therefore she moved away to her former seat, rather than remain to witness it, there to muse on one word, one sound—apart from all others, her own name unconsciously pronounced by his lips. Stillness again prevailed for some time, broken by the Rector’s voice faintly asking—

“Are you there, Miss Vane?”

“Yes ! do you wish for anything?” she replied, coming instantly to his side.

“Yes ; that you would sit where I can see you without moving my head—am I unreasonable?” he asked with a smile.

She answered by rising quietly, and with a heightened colour, she seated herself at the foot of the sofa. Although she would not suffer her eyes for a moment to meet his, she felt that



as he lay, he was watching her, and a thrill of strange delight—a new sensation that she had never known before, shook her whole being. She gloried in the consciousness that some one was taking comfort in her presence, and that “some one,” such a man as Mr. Ravenshaw.

The sound of wheels, and subsequent entrance of the doctor, put to flight this silent union of souls ; but it could not put to flight the strong love which in that night of mutual support and dependence took possession of their hearts, and drew them towards each other.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE OLD PARSONAGE.

“The pear and quince lay squandered on the grass,  
The mould was purple with unheeded showers  
Of bloomy plums—a wilderness it was  
Of fruits, and weeds, and flowers !

The marigold amidst the nettles blew ;  
The gourd embraced the rose-bush in its ramble,  
The thistle and the stock together grew,  
The holly-hock and bramble.

The bear-bine with the lilac interlaced ;  
The sturdy burdock choked its slender neighbour,  
The spicy pink. All tokens were effaced  
Of human care and labour.”

Hood.

THE wound in Mr. Ravenshaw's arm was pronounced by the surgeon to be by no means

severe, although occasioning much pain from the number of small shot that had entered the flesh, and which had to be removed ; while he suffered from great weakness, consequent upon the excessive loss of blood. Fortunately no portion of the bone had been injured, and after the hurt had been washed, and skilfully dressed, the doctor left his patient with an injunction to keep his arm in a sling, and he would ensure its perfect cure in a fortnight. The next morning Mr. Ravenshaw surprised Miss Vane by joining her in the breakfast room at ten o'clock ; he still looked pale, and complained of slight pain, but expressed himself much refreshed by a few hours' quiet sleep. Carefully, yet unofficially, did Beatrice anticipate the Rector's every want during their meal, that he might not feel embarrassed by his inability to assist himself with his maimed arm. He was more deeply sensible of her silent attentions, more sincerely grateful for them, than Beatrice supposed or even wished.

"I do not know, now, Mr. Ravenshaw, how you received that shot, or by whom it was fired," said Miss Vane, in the course of breakfast, "although I have received most of the particulars of last night's affair from Waklyn this morning."

"It was a stray shot, not directly aimed at me," replied the Rector; "for from consideration to my office as a man of peace, I refrained from taking an active part in the affray, especially as I saw there were an ample number to cope with the thieves, who appeared unarmed except with thick sticks, which were soon wrested from them. However, I was watching young Newton, who seemed an unequal match for his antagonist, a thick-set fellow with the vilest squint I ever beheld, and presently I saw the man dexterously swing the lad off, while from the breast of his coat he drew a pistol—to my belief he was the only one among them who carried fire-arms. He raised it steadily—Newton sprang up to renew the attack—I instantly

stepped forward to dash the pistol from the villain's hand, when I heard the sharp click of the trigger, and, owing to the man's receding a step, my arm just passed before the muzzle of the pistol as the charge left it. In the excitement of the moment—for Newton and myself instantly seized and bound the ruffian—I forgot that I was wounded, until the faintings that overpowered me in the drawing-room, and the pain I became sensible of, when all necessity for exertion was over, reminded me of it; but there was yet another victim, last night, offered up at the shrine of the marauders, a fuller and more fatal sacrifice than my few drops of blood. Have you heard the loss you have sustained, Miss Vane?"

"Yes, I have," she replied; "poor Tiger! his was an ignominious death for such a splendid animal;" and the tears forced themselves into her dark eyes.

"Not an ignominious one," said Mr. Ravenshaw; "he fell in a noble cause—in defence of a noble lady."

The Rector rose as he spoke—they had concluded breakfast—and expressed his intention of returning to the Parsonage.

“Are you sure you are strong enough to walk, or will you let me order the carriage for you, Mr. Ravenshaw? I think that would be better,” said Miss Vane, anxiously.

The Rector declined this offer with many thanks, and bade his young hostess a cordial farewell. The appearance of their clergyman, so wan and disabled, excited for him the tender compassion and sympathy of the villagers, and many times were his steps arrested between the Hall and the Parsonage, that he might receive their condolences for his injury, and their frankly-offered applause at his skill and bravery throughout the affair, with every particular of which they were by that time familiar. One or two of those to whom Miss Vane’s proud disdain and indifference had given mortal offence, ventured to rebuke him for perilling his own life to save their little-loved patroness; but these he

silenced by the words—"As ye have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men," and made them ashamed for the selfishness of their own hearts.

On reaching the Rectory, Mr. Ravenshaw found Charlie all anxiety to hear from his lips an account of last night's panic, of which rumours had reached his ears, and he was quite agitated when he learnt the danger that had threatened his cousin's household. The Rector looked at the boy's excited countenance.

"Now, Charlie," he said, "I see the wisdom of not telling you the cause of my mysterious absence last night, and other things that puzzled you. I did not like appearing to place no confidence in you, or to treat you like a child, but I felt sure you would take no rest if I told you the matter that occupied us."

"It was very kind, very considerate of you, sir," replied the boy; "I should not have feared so much for Beatrice since she had your protection, but I should have fretted at my own

helplessness at such a time, and I almost a man; but——dear Beatrice! was she very much frightened?—Have you seen her this morning?”

“Your cousin behaved like a woman of spirit, Charlie; and as undoubtedly the best part of valour is discretion, so she showed her bravery by courageously and patiently awaiting the issue of the conflict, not hampering our exertions by her own timidity, or foolishly exposing herself to danger.”

“That is just like Beatrice,” cried the boy, his eyes sparkling. “Dear, brave girl! do you not almost love her, Mr. Ravenshaw?”

The colour spread itself over the Rector’s pale cheek and brow, and he left the room. Charles was now old enough to comprehend that he might, by his simple and almost involuntary speech, have struck home to Mr. Ravenshaw’s heart. Yet, could it be? was it possible?—Oh, happy Beatrice! was his first thought, to have won the love of such a man



as the Rector, and his own heart danced with delight as he dwelt rapturously on the idea of seeing the two beings he so dearly loved united in one ; but then, when he remembered his cousin's singularity of character and unvarying coldness hitherto towards those who had sued for her hand (and Charlie ran over in his mind the list of discarded suitors whom he had heard his mother say had sought Beatrice's affection) ; then he trembled lest his best friend, the man whom he looked upon as almost superhuman in his excellence and worth, should be destined to meet that of all earthly trials almost the most bitter, an unrequited passion. He was not left long to build and destroy castles in the air, for the Rector soon returned.

“ Charlie,” he said with a kind smile, “ I feel idle to-day, and not at all *bookish*, so we must take another holiday, which, as your father begged I would not work you too hard, I think we may feel justified in doing. If my arm will allow me, I wish to write a line to my sister,

Mrs. Berkeley, and invite her and her youngest child to come and pay me a visit here. What would you like to do with yourself?"

"If you please, sir, I should very much like to go and see Beatrice," answered Charles, eagerly.

"Do so, it is a nice morning. Robert had better go with you, I shall not want him, and he's stronger than Bogue. Then you can stay but until dinner-time; but come home then, Charles."

"Yes, sir, I will. Is your arm very painful? Beatrice may ask me; what shall I tell her?"

"Tell her," answered the Rector, laughing, "that it is now only a pleasing remembrance that I had the honour of defending her last night, and will be always numbered by me among my glorious scars. Now, tell me, Charlie, before you go, is this house fit to ask a lady to come and stay in?"

"Why not, sir?—What is the matter with it?"

"The furniture is moth-eaten, and the curtains and carpets are dingy, while the rats and mice make themselves a great deal too much at home in the upper room ; and as for the garden, it is a perfect wilderness," replied the Rector, with a hopeless sigh, as he looked from the window.

"Well, but, sir, it is too late for flowers now. Tell Bogue to clear all those weeds from the path, and then it will look very pretty, I am sure."

"I'll take your advice, Charles."

After the boy was gone, Mr. Ravenshaw opened his desk and sat down to write to his sister ; Mrs. Berkeley's name was "Emily," but by some extraordinary hallucination he commenced his letter thus : "My dear Beatrice." The colour mounted to his brow as he instantly observed the mistake, but looked fondly at the words before he crumpled the sheet of paper in his hand, and taking another, substituted the right name.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE SECRET DISCOVERED.

"'Twas written in her very air,  
That Love had passed and entered there."

WILLIS.

As we trust our readers will be happy to hear that the burglars who attempted a midnight invasion of Hazelwood Hall do not figure again in the pages of our story, it may be as well to state at once that they remained securely lodged within the safe precincts of N—— gaol until the following assizes, when they were all tried, and received, as their sentence, transportation for the term of seven years.

Autumn's gay tints had now given place to

the bare branches of winter ; the many-coloured leaves lay withered on the gravel-walks and in the narrow lanes of Hazelwood, as December asserted his right to reign, and heralded the advent of Christmas with his blazing log fires and long, cheerful evenings. But the departure of daylight brought no hilarity or merriment to Miss Vane's hearth ; alone she sat in her lamp-lit drawing-room, without a friendly face or friendly voice beside her, solitary in her grandeur. Perhaps Beatrice began to feel her voluntary isolation and self-banishment from the pale of society irksome and depressing, for she certainly appeared to grow daily more listless, more reserved, and more depressed ; paler she could scarcely become, for her white skin had never, unless excited by some emotion, more of the rose tint than is to be found on the marble cheek and brow of a sculptor's model.

The only events that aroused and interested her were the frequent visits of her cousin Charlie, who, now that the Rector had his house full of

guests (consisting of his brother-in-law, Colonel Berkeley, with his wife, child, and servant), had ample leisure and full permission to appropriate his especial vehicle and spend his days as he pleased. Mr. Ravenshaw's visits to the Hall had been much fewer after the night of the burglary, and had, since his sister's arrival at the Parsonage, altogether ceased.

It was with an air of lassitude and weariness, and a heaviness of the eyelids, as though sleep had not refreshed her, that Beatrice Vane came down to her solitary breakfast one morning during the first week in December. The post was early at Hazelwood, and two letters lay on her plate; one was from her aunt, Mrs. Herbert, the other, in a schoolboy's handwriting, cramped and irregular, bearing the "Harrow" post mark. Miss Vane smiled, as she recognised it instantly as a production from her cousin Vane's pen, and knowing that his effusions were usually concise and characteristic, she did him the honour of opening his letter before his mother's.

The contents ran thus :

“ Harrow School, December 4th.

“ MY DEAR TRISSY,

“ Thank you for writing to me on my birth-day, and sending me such a handsome *tip*. I know I ought to have written to you sooner about it, but we have been worked so deuced hard with examinations, I've had no time. We break up here on the 18th. I shall manage to get away on the 16th, and go up to Town with some more of our fellows who leave on that day. I'm very glad we are going to spend Christmas in London—it is so slow down at Ashleigh Park in winter. I hope you and Charlie will soon come home. The governor sent me a five-pound note on my birth-day. Isn't he a jolly old *brick*? I'm going into 'tails and stick-ups this Christmas. I can't write any more—a fellow has just knocked over the ink.

“ Ever your affectionate Cousin,

“ HARLEY VANE HERBERT.”

"P.S. (written in pencil.) Of course you know John's going to be married."

It would have been supposed, after the glimpse into Miss Vane's heart afforded to the reader, during her interview with her cousin John, that this last piece of intelligence would have been powerless to affect her—but it appeared not entirely so; for the proud blood mantled to her cheek and brow, and bright sparks flashed in her large dark eyes. There are very few women who can hear calmly of a former lover's or discarded suitor's projected marriage; although they may be perfectly indifferent to them—perhaps themselves attached or betrothed to some one else. Their vanity receives a wound; and they are vexed to believe their own image superseded, or entirely erased, by another's. There was something excessively galling to Miss Vane's pride in this prompt transfer of her cousin's suit elsewhere—in the knowledge that he had so easily found one whose attractions could outweigh hers



in the balance, and whom he considered as competent as herself to adorn and grace his princely establishment. But Beatrice struggled with this unworthy sentiment, and had conquered it before she broke the seal of her aunt's letter—anticipating the confirmation of what Vane had taken for granted she had been made acquainted with. She read as follows:—

“ Brook Street, December 5th.

“ MY DEAREST NIECE,

“ You should not have been kept so long in ignorance of an important family event that is impending, but that I have been suffering from an attack of influenza caught at Lady V——’s ball last Thursday, which has kept me to my bed until to-day. This important event is no less than the contemplated marriage of our eldest son. We have often wondered that John, with his fine house and fortune, did not seem to think of a wife; but he has now taken the step so precipitately that

we are almost breathless with surprise. We had not the least idea such a matter was in agitation;—and, between ourselves, Beatrice I cannot understand the love that springs up in one night, or that people are not afraid to take each other for better and worse, and promise to live together till death part them, when a few hours' intercourse comprehends all the knowledge they can have obtained of each other's characters and dispositions. I must own I am a little disappointed at John's choice. I had suffered myself to cherish other views for him—and had hoped he would have given me, as a daughter, one who has ever been as dear to me. I have no right to inquire by whose fault it is that my hopes are disappointed; but, when you were all children together, you never seemed to like poor John, and I cannot think how you could help it—he, so amiable and handsome. However, Mr. Herbert quite approves of his choice; and, I assure you, his betrothed is a very pretty girl. She has no fortune; but dear John

is too disinterested to care for that. I suppose her sweet face and elegant figure won his heart. She is not very unlike you, dear Beatrice, for she is tall and elegant ; but she is younger, and consequently, more girlish-looking—while she has your stylish, dashing appearance yet to acquire. I have no doubt when she has the means to dress herself handsomely, she will improve wonderfully—for the beauty of her face is undeniable. But my pen is running on the bride-elect's external attractions in a most prosy way, and I have not told you who she is, or where John met with her. I suspect I have begun, as my husband so often accuses me of doing, at the wrong end of my story. I expressed surprise, my dear Beatrice, at the sudden step John has taken when I began my letter ; and I am sure you will share my astonishment when I tell you that he met Miss Murray for the first time at Lady V——'s ball. Every one admired her, and she was universally pronounced the belle of the room. I

observed that John danced with her very many times, and paid her a great deal of attention ; but I was not prepared for the intelligence he brought us the next day, namely, that he had called that afternoon at Mr. Murray's, made proposals for his daughter's hand, and had been accepted.

“ Mr. Murray is a merchant, but I believe his income is not large, and he has a large family of sons, although only one daughter. I have not seen John since his engagement, as my indisposition has confined me to my room, but he immediately acquainted his father with the step he had taken ; I shall be glad to talk over this and other chit-chat with you, dear Trissy, when you come to London. My mind is full of this important event, so nearly concerning the happiness of my own dear son, and just now I feel as if I *could* write of nothing else. Vane comes home the week after next. We shall miss dear Syd sadly from our Christmas circle. I forget whether I told you when I last

wrote, that we had received a hasty line from him ; his voyage had been safely accomplished as far as the Cape—it was a comfort to know he was well, poor dear boy. I quite dread the effect the hot climate may have on him. His next letter will be dated from Madras, I trust. We hope you have had no further alarm of robbers or any other midnight terror, and that the Rector's arm is recovering ? How nobly he acted ! What an escape you had with that bad man in the house. I had no idea Stephen would have turned out such a reprobate, although I never much liked the expression of the man's face. I will make enquiries as you wish about another footman to supply his place ; but I hope you will soon come up to town yourself, and then you can assist me in the selection. We must be very strict in our enquiries this time ; I thought you ran a risk in taking a servant at poor old Waklyn's recommendation only, but I did not like to interfere in the matter, as I might have prejudiced you wrongfully.

"I hope your next letter will say when we may expect you and Charlie. I shall send George down the day before, to attend Charles on the journey. I am very glad to hear you think the latter looks stronger than when he came to Hazelwood. We owe you and the good Rector a large debt of gratitude for your kindness and attention to our poor little afflicted boy. Kind love to Charlie and yourself, and remembrances to Mr. Ravenshaw—ever dear Beatrice's attached aunt,

"ELIZABETH HERBERT."

"Why couple my name with his? 'You and the good Rector'—'yourself and Mr. Ravenshaw,'" muttered Miss Vane, impatiently, as she restored the letter to its envelope, and placed it in the tiny pocket of her little black silk apron, applying herself to her breakfast with more zeal than appetite apparently, for she helped herself to sundry incongruous edibles, which could by no chemical process be induced to

amalgamate palatably. Beatrice looked neither so cold nor self-possessed as usual; her cheek was a little flushed, and her brow was clouded. She soon left the breakfast-room, and her almost untasted plate of ham, marmalade, and buttered toast, to all of which she had helped herself recklessly and indiscriminately, while old Waklyn wondered "what on airth could ha' come over the young missus, for no wonder she couldn't eat sich a mess as that there."

In the course of the morning Charlie came in, and by that time his cousin had quite recovered her wonted composure.

"Any letter from home?" was his first question.

"Yes, one from your mother, Charles; she wishes to know when we are going up to London," replied Miss Vane.

"Ah, I thought so. I don't want to go," grumbled the boy.

"My *dear* Charlie," exclaimed his cousin, reprovingly.

"Well, I'm much happier here—however, I suppose we must go home for Christmas ; but I mean to come back with *you*, Trissy, mind. How long shall you stay?"

"Time enough to think about coming away when we get to London, Charlie," replied his cousin, with a most provoking smile. "I assure you I'm going to enjoy myself, whatever *you* may mean to do, you crabbed young gentleman," and crumpling her cambric handkerchief into a ball, she flung it at him.

"Be civil, Trissy ; oh, if I were not such a helpless heap of humanity, I'd punish you in most manly fashion," cried the boy, laughing ; but sparks of genuine admiration lighted his eyes, as they followed his cousin's movements. She began arranging some hot-house flowers in a glass vase.

"I think we had better start for London next Tuesday, Charlie."

"Very well, dear, as you will. I'm afraid



Mr. Ravenshaw will be very dull without us," added the boy, reflectively.

Miss Vane laughed sarcastically.

"Upon my word *we* have a good opinion of ourselves ; for my part, I cannot flatter myself *I* am at all necessary to the Rector's cheerfulness ; it is very many weeks now since Mr. Ravenshaw honoured the Hall with a visit."

She bent her head over the delicate blossoms, and *thought* that the proud tears which *would* force themselves into her eyes passed unnoticed ; but Charlie was regarding his cousin attentively—he felt that he "could a tale unfold," as the reader shall learn in the next chapter, but, boy as he was, suffering and weakness had engendered habits of thought, and thought had engendered discretion. After a moment's silence, he observed,

"Trissy, if any man deserves to be happy, it is Mr. Ravenshaw—yet I do not think he is perfectly so."

"From whence draw you these conclusions,

my most sapient cousin ?” asked Miss Vane, with an attempt at gaiety too evidently forced.

“Why, of course when the Colonel was staying at the Parsonage, he went about with him a good deal, but since he has left I have observed he seldom smiles, and he does not settle to any employment, or——”

“So you think he’s fretting after that fat, comfortable-looking Colonel ?”

“Nonsense, Trissy,” said the boy, reddening ; “I think no such thing. I know *what* I think—but now you’re beginning to turn all I say into ridicule, I shan’t tell you anything.”

“Oh, pray do, dear Charlie, I *will* be good ;” and Miss Vane wiped away a few fictitious tears ; but the boy turned sulky, and it required full ten minutes’ caresses, and the additional bribe of a piece of plum cake and a glass of wine to bring him back to the former subject, and this time Beatrice took care not to baulk the curiosity she had inherited from her mother Eve, by any mistimed levity or sarcasm.

"Well, I'll tell you, Trissy," continued young Herbert, "what I mean. You see, he does nothing but walk about the house or garden all day with little Harry Berkeley in his arms—have you ever seen the child, dear?"

"No, never; I saw the Colonel and Mrs. Berkeley at church on Sunday."

"Yes, and Mr. Ravenshaw would have introduced them to you, I know, only you went off so quickly after service. I like the Colonel, but I do not quite understand Mrs. Berkeley."

"My dear Charlie, how you are rambling away from your story," exclaimed his cousin, impatiently; "go on about little Harry."

"I will directly; but don't you think you ought to have called on Mrs. Berkeley, I'm sure Mr. Ravenshaw——"

"I shall not do any such thing," interrupted Miss Vane, with decision, "go on."

"Well, you certainly are the most self-willed determined girl I ever knew," exclaimed Charles,

"I wonder how your husband will manage you."

A smile played round Miss Vane's sweet lips.

"On the hypothesis that I ever have one, Charlie," she said, seating herself on the sofa beside him.

"That will rest with yourself, dear," said the boy, and he passed his arms lovingly round her neck. "God give you discernment enough to choose such an one as will make you happy, darling."

"Thank you, Charlie," she whispered, and stooping down she kissed his pale forehead. "Now tell me about little Harry."

"Yes, yes ; to be sure—what a fellow I am. Well, you must know he is so very fond of his little nephew—you cannot think how handsome he looks, Trissy, when he has the child in his arms, and lets him pass his fingers through his black hair—for it is still black, although there is some grey mixed with it. Little

Harry asked him one day why he had 'two colours in his hair, and he himself had only one?' Mr. Ravenshaw stroked his curly head, and looked at him so fondly as he said, 'when I was your age, Harry, my locks were thick and curly like yours, but I'm growing an old man now, and my hair is white with sorrow that I have no good little boys of my own like you to care for me and love me.' 'But you shall be my papa; I will have you,' said Harry. 'You are my own dear little nephew, but I must not steal you from papa and mamma, Harry. What would they do without their little son?' Mr. Ravenshaw replied; and I could tell you a great deal more, for I always listen when he talks to Harry, he has such a kind tender manner with children—no wonder they love him. Why! what is the matter, Trissy?"

Miss Vane hid her face in her hands.

"Don't Charlie, I cannot bear it—you must not talk of him any more."

“Dearest Trissy, is it possible that you love Mr. Ravenshaw?” exclaimed Charles, seizing her hands, and holding them in his own; but she still turned her head aside.

“You have no right to put that question to me, Charlie; when *he* asks it I shall answer it. Now, unless you wish me to leave you, find some other topic for your discourse than the Rector.”

Charles had discovered the secret he had been striving to ascertain, so had the good tact to obey this command.

“Well, then, Trissy, tell me what mamma said in her letter.”

“I will give you all the news in it. And here is one from Vane, too, which you can read yourself.”

Charlie opened his brother's note.

“Won't Vane be a conceited puppy now he's gone into man's clothes?” was all Charlie's comment as he finished perusing its contents.

"No, I like Vane, he is a fine manly fellow," was the reply.

"They have heard from Sydney," added his cousin, "off the Cape; only a line to say he was safe and well."

"That's all right—is that all the news, Trissy?"

"No; I've reserved the most important piece of intelligence to the last. John is going to be married."

The boy sprang upright in astonishment.

"John? you don't mean it! to whom? when? how was it? tell me all about it. Somehow or other I cannot fancy John the adamantine! the knight of the stony countenance in love."

"Neither can I," murmured his companion.

She read to Charles that portion of his mother's letter that gave them information on the subject, carefully omitting the allusions contained in it to herself. Charlie made a wry face when he had heard his cousin to the end,

and followed the grimace by the following remark,—

“Ye gods ! commend me to Mr. John for a cool specimen of assurance and conceit ; he makes proposals to the father for the daughter’s hand, receives *his* sanction, and walks away considering himself an engaged man, when the young lady concerned hasn’t had a voice in the matter. This may be a highly proper honourable correct mode of proceeding ; but give me your honest, hearty lovers who take their answer from the eyes and lips first, and then proceed to consult ‘ papas’ and all that business.”

Miss Vane laughed merrily at Charlie’s view of the case, and after a little more home chat, Charlie said he had told Robert to call for him in an hour, who, on enquiry, proved to be waiting outside.

“I promised Mr. Ravenshaw to return by five, as he said he could read with me a little this morning,” he added.

His cousin did not attempt to detain him as



this was the case, but allowed him to depart, merely repeating her resolution of going to town the following week, in which arrangements Charles acquiesced with resignation, though without any outward demonstration of pleasure.

END OF VOL. I.

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